

The LINGER-NOTS *and the* MYSTERY HOUSE

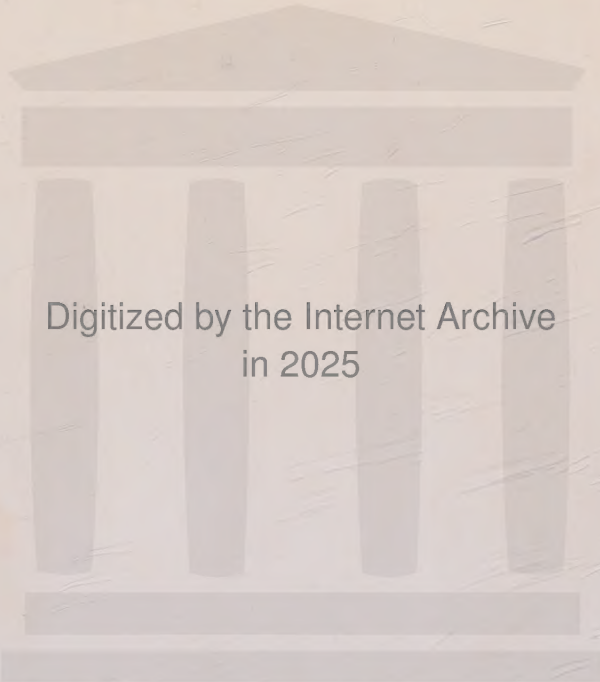


AGNES MILLER



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Irene Mc. Phillips
225 Davidson Ave.
Canandaigua N. Y.



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WITH THE STRANGEST, RUSTIEST CREAK, THE THIRD
PANEL MOVED SLIGHTLY.

"The Linger-Nots and the Mystery House"

Page 163

THE LINGER-NOTS
and the
MYSTERY HOUSE

OR

The Story of Nine Adventurous Girls

By AGNES MILLER

Author of

"The Linger-Nots and the Valley Feud," "The
Linger-Nots and Their Golden Quest," etc.

ILLUSTRATED

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THE LINGER-NOTS SERIES

By AGNES MILLER

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THE LINGER-NOTS AND THE MYSTERY HOUSE
Or, The Story of Nine Adventurous Girls

THE LINGER-NOTS AND THE VALLEY FEUD
Or, The Great West Point Chain

THE LINGER-NOTS AND THEIR GOLDEN QUEST
Or, The Log of the Ocean Monarch

Other volumes in preparation

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THE LINGER-NOTS AND THE MYSTERY HOUSE

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INTRODUCTION

The Linger-Nots are bright girls who are too lively to stay idle indoors and too sensible to waste their time. They form a club of nine members and begin at once to discover useful things to do, each according to her talents and disposition. After overcoming many troubles among themselves and having numerous interesting adventures, they began to become entangled in the mysteries of their one big task. In unraveling these puzzles, they were led to find a secret room in the old house, where there were many relics of pioneer days, and the romantic diary of a girl who lived in that house. It showed the heroism of the people in the dangers of the War of 1812. Incidentally, several wrongs are righted and numerous happy results come from the sensible activities of the girls, not to speak of improvements in their own dispositions.

The year had been so profitable in the good things accomplished, that the following season they were eager to try again to see what new experience they could have together in com-

INTRODUCTION

binning pleasure with usefulness. Their adventures are told in a second volume, entitled "The Linger-Nots and the Valley Feud, or, The Great West Point Chain."

To the bright fancy of a group of girls who in years gone by first conceived the name of LINGER-NOTS, the author pays her tribute.

THE PUBLISHERS.

THE LINGER-NOTS AND THE MYSTERY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

OUT OF THE WINDOW

“**J**OYCE, do come in here a minute!” called Evelyn through the door that led into her sister’s room, whence were issuing numerous thumps, scrapes, and squeaks such as are always heard anywhere on moving day.

“Just a second, I’m fixing my dressing-table,” came the reply. A moment later a final bump announced the settling of that important article of furniture against the wall, and twelve-year-old Joyce popped her long red curls through the doorway and demanded:

“What is it, Evelyn?”

“Where shall I put this terrible desk? I don’t know whether it’s better here beside the bed, or over in that empty space by the closet.”

Joyce crossed the room with a capable air, and stood beside her tall sister, who was viewing undecidedly all possible sites for a small, battered, old-fashioned golden oak desk, which was standing forlornly in the middle of the floor.

Evelyn was the elder of the sisters by two years, and her heavy braid of fine, wavy dark brown hair drawn back from a white forehead, and her deep-set blue eyes, with their arched black eyebrows and lashes, contrasted strikingly with Joyce's auburn hair and shell-pink coloring. Both girls wore long-sleeved blue aprons, and both looked dusty, flushed, and supremely happy.

"The desk is so shabby alongside of that pretty brass bed," said Evelyn. "That's why I thought of putting it off at the other end of the room."

"But you can't see to write there."

"I know it, but what can I do? It's not a very good time to ask father for a new desk, is it?"

"Well, hardly!" exclaimed Joyce, beginning to get one of her frequent attacks of giggles. "Not when he's just managed to buy this darling house after the hardest sort of time! I thought we were going to have to camp out on the sidewalk. No, Evelyn, you must keep the old desk for a while. Now, if it were mine, I'd

put it"—Joyce spun slowly all the way around on her heel, gazing at every inch of the room in turn.

"Well, where?"

"Between the windows!"

As she spoke, Joyce gave a jump toward the east wall of the room, where two narrow old-fashioned windows with small panes of glass were opened to admit the warm October afternoon breeze.

"Here, Evelyn, let's move the bookcase you've got here down beside the closet. Your books will be just as convenient there. And now for the desk!"

Together the two girls drew the desk to the space between the windows, where it fitted easily, and where the bright light from the open sky seemed to bring out the soft glow of the old wood rather than emphasize its defects.

"I knew you'd have a good idea, Joyce. You always do have good ones—that is, for a kid!" said Evelyn teasingly. "I guess I can write well enough on this desk, even if it is old. I shall just sit here and scribble and look at the river all day long."

"Well, I," declared Joyce emphatically, "shall go out into that lovely red and yellow park the first minute I get a chance. Oh, Evelyn, isn't it just perfectly wonderful to have a house in New York? I thought I wouldn't

like living 'way over East here after having been used to those big West Side apartment houses all my life, but honestly I never was so happy! Isn't it lovely to *own* stairs?"

"There's nothing like it!" agreed Evelyn. "And just think, we're in the middle of a whole row of dear little red brick houses like this one, right on the park and the river! I wonder what the people here are like, and if there are any other girls for us to know?"

"There are," declared the sharp-eyed Joyce, "for I saw several coming home from school this afternoon when I was on the stoop telling the moving-man about the piano. They went into other houses in the row."

"I hope they'll be nice," said Evelyn.

Two floors below, a front door suddenly banged, and a burst of melodious whistling floated up the stairwell.

"There's Dick!" cried Joyce. "I'm going to get him to unnailed the book-boxes!"

She dashed down the precious stairs, and Evelyn, rather tired from her busy day, sank down for a moment at her desk by the window, to think over the Barry family's latest possession, a small old-fashioned house in a beautiful but unfashionable New York neighborhood.

For eight years the Barrys had lived happily in a comfortable apartment on the other side of the city, but a sudden and heavy increase in

their rent had caused them to look for quarters elsewhere. No other apartments were to be found in their own section of the city, however, and the family were contemplating leaving New York altogether, at great inconvenience to Mr. Barry's business, when, by the greatest good fortune, the present house had been offered to them.

An old lady who had long been a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Barry, and who had lived in the house for over twenty years, suddenly decided to give up housekeeping and go to live with her married daughter. She offered the house at a price which Mr. Barry could afford to pay, and so quickly was the arrangement made, that the five Barrys had moved in only six weeks after the purchase.

Though still a little dazed by the suddenness of the move, Evelyn and Joyce considered the house perfectly enchanting. Situated far uptown, on a street running parallel to the river front and separated from it only by a charming little park, the house, like its neighbors in the row, was three stories high, built with a winding stoop and an arched doorway. The two lower stories of red brick were topped with a third of blue slate, and a thick wisteria vine, to which many leaves still clung, stretched from the basement to the roof.

To Evelyn, the most delightful thing about

the house was the fact that the front room in the blue-slate third story was entirely her own. The two smaller ones in the back belonged to Joyce and Dick, the sixteen-year-old son of the house. Evelyn had never before had a room all to herself, and in the apartment she had always had much ado to find space for her many books and the numerous plays and stories that she loved to write after school hours.

“No more of that now, though!” she thought happily to herself. “I’ll use this desk just to write on—it needn’t be a storehouse any more. And what a view! No more pavements and fire-escapes!”

The scene lying before her was certainly one which could be seen from few homes in any city. The “new” house was directly opposite the junction of two rivers, the Harlem to the north and the East River to the south, and in the wide silver stream Evelyn could see several islands, still green. On the opposite shore many tall, picturesque smokestacks of busy factories stood out against the pale blue autumn sky, and far in the distance a great steel bridge, which a train was crossing, joined the city and Long Island. In the foreground was what Joyce had called the “red and yellow park,” and the brightest spot in the gay scene consisted of four scarlet chimneys that peeped above the topmost boughs of the gorgeous trees.

For several minutes Evelyn gazed rapturously at the scene before her, and then, suddenly, a girlish voice which seemed, strangely enough, to come from outside the window, broke on her ear:

"If we leave it here, it'll be cool in no time."

"All right, but don't put it on the ledge, it might fall down," replied another girl's voice, warningly.

Her curiosity fully aroused, Evelyn thrust her head half-way out of the window, and there, on a little railed stone balcony that adorned the third story of the house next door, were two girls her own age, setting a very large pan of steaming fudge on the balcony floor.

For an instant, Evelyn gazed at them in silence and they at her. Then she quickly recollected herself.

"Oh, excuse me!" she apologized smilingly, starting to draw back.

"Don't go away," said the elder of the two politely. She was slim and graceful, and wore her light brown hair stylishly puffed over her ears and knotted low behind. "You're just moving in to-day, aren't you? We heard a family named Barry was coming."

"Yes, I'm Evelyn Barry," replied Evelyn. "Do you girls live next door?"

"I do," said the slim girl. "My name is Priscilla Cleveland, and this is Dorothy Stone.

She lives in the back alley. Don't you, Dotty?"

Dorothy, a plump, athletic maiden in a middy blouse, shook her black bobbed locks defiantly at Priscilla, and laughed.

"That's what everyone here calls Straiton Court," she explained to Evelyn. "Do you know where that is?"

"Why, yes, it's where these houses turn and run around a garden right behind us. I think it's the dearest place!" answered Evelyn. "I noticed it when father brought me here to see this house, and it looked so cosy that at first I was disappointed because our house wasn't there."

"Ha, ha!" cried Dorothy triumphantly. "See how the back alley impresses strangers, Prissy. I guess you think you'll like it here," she added to Evelyn.

"I'm sure I shall! You see, I've never lived in a house before, only in an apartment. I think this is going to be wonderful!"

"It is pretty nice," said Priscilla, looking at Evelyn with a friendly and appreciative smile. "I've always lived here, and I still like it!"

She tested the fudge with a knife, and then said:

"This is hard enough now, Dorothy. You cut up that end, and I'll cut this one."

"I'm going to have a little tiny piece first," announced Dorothy, and having dug out three

portions which were certainly not tiny, or even little, and conveyed one of them to Evelyn, who proved herself a good catch, she joined Priscilla in carving up the fudge industriously. Evelyn knelt down on her floor close by the window, and the girls continued to talk.

"We're making this for our club to sell," explained Priscilla, "and we brought it up here to my room to cool before my two brothers got home from school, or there wouldn't have been a piece left!"

"Oh, have you a club? How nice!" said Evelyn, much interested.

"We've only just started it——"

"Priscilla got it up," interjected Dorothy.

"It has seven members so far, all girls that live here in our block."

"Except Rose Willing," said Dorothy.

"Oh, yes, she lives in the Jaffrey House," agreed Priscilla. "You haven't been there yet, I suppose?"

"No, I don't know where it is," said Evelyn.

"It's that old house up on the hill in the middle of the park," explained Priscilla, waving her fudge-knife towards the river. "See those four red chimneys just over the trees? That's the Jaffrey House. It was built about a hundred and twenty years ago, and last spring it was made into a museum. Rose's father is the curator, so she lives there."

"What sort of things does your club do?" asked Evelyn.

"First, we gave a fair to raise money for the Fresh Air Fund, and to-day all the girls are making candy to sell to-morrow afternoon at school, when the Senior Class gives an entertainment for the Junior Red Cross. And pretty soon we are going to help with a neighborhood entertainment that is going to be given to raise funds for our public library, to buy books for the Children's Room. Of course we like to help other people, but what we really are going to be, if we can, is a dramatic club. We all love to act, and we want to give our own plays. In the meantime, though, we have to live up to our name, don't we, Dorothy?"

"We certainly do, and I think we're managing to," replied her friend.

"What is your club-name, if I may ask?" inquired Evelyn.

"We call ourselves 'The Linger-Nots,' so we'll always keep going ahead," answered Priscilla.

Evelyn's eyes sparkled. These would be wonderful girls to know! What a place to live, with seven other girls her own age, a river, a park, and a museum! And the girls liked plays just as much as she did, apparently. There was no end to what this new home on the parkway might produce.

As Evelyn looked across the park once more, and again took in the beauties of her surroundings, a thin curl of smoke began to rise out of the second of the four red chimneys on the Jaffrey House.

"Oh, Rose has lit her fire!" said Dorothy, following Evelyn's gaze. "She promised to make a lot of popcorn for to-morrow. Isn't she the dearest girl, even if she does seem to keep so much to herself? Prissy, I think we ought to go in now and tie this fudge up in packages."

"I really must go," said Evelyn hastily. "Mother will be wondering what has become of me. Thank you so much for the nice fudge, girls!"

"Maybe we'll see you at school," suggested the ever-polite Priscilla. "Shall you go to the Clifton?"

"Yes, Joyce—my sister—and I have been transferred there."

"Then we'll see you to-morrow," said both Priscilla and Dorothy in exact concert. Then, laughing because they had spoken simultaneously, they picked up the fudge-pan and disappeared through the window into Priscilla's room."

Evelyn descended the three flights of stairs to the dining-room in the twinkling of an eye, and enfolded her mother, who was trying to

find a table-cloth for dinner, in the most violent of affectionate embraces. •

“Oh, mother dear,” she cried, “I’m so glad we moved! I’m going to find some glorious friends. We’re going to have some splendid times and have lots of happy things happen.”

“That’s the way to feel about it,” replied her mother. “Just as sure as you feel that way straight through about friends, no matter what their faults, just that sure you will have them.”

CHAPTER II

THE EXCURSION

IN a few days the Barrys were settled, and in a week more Evelyn had become acquainted with the seven neighbors whom she had longed to meet.

They all went to the Clifton School, and though they were in different classes, as their ages ranged from twelve to fifteen, they were, as it happened, all assigned to the same section of the domestic science course.

This was a class which Evelyn enjoyed, although she was frankly not very fond of cooking. But the fact that she met the Linger-Nots in the class was not the only reason she liked it. One of its chief charms, in Evelyn's eyes, was a program of excursions, arranged from time to time, to factories, bakeries, and markets where the young idea was taught to shoot in the most modern way in regard to foodstuffs. Evelyn, and it is to be feared, some of the others, as well, enjoyed the adventure of the excursions as much as the instruction.

Not so Joyce, however, or, for that matter, Dick.

"Our domestic science class is going on an excursion this afternoon," announced Evelyn, one morning at breakfast. "Isn't it splendid, mother, we're going to be right across the river to Astoria, where I've always wanted to explore."

"The real point is, what are you going to learn?" remarked Dick instructively, helping himself liberally to more griddle-cakes.

"We're going to a big bakery, to learn how to bake bread and cake and crackers properly," answered Joyce.

"Good!" said Dick approvingly. "That's a fine thing for girls to know."

"I guess you mean it makes fine things for boys to eat," said Joyce astutely.

"Honestly, I never thought of that," said the innocent Dick. "But of course I'll be glad to know that those fierce-looking smokestacks across the river help to make anything as good as cake and crackers."

"Oh, Dick! Don't you like those smokestacks?" exclaimed Evelyn. "I think they're so interesting-looking."

"I don't understand your taste," said Dick, shaking his head. "I like the taste of the crackers much better!"

"I'm sorry I haven't anything to throw at

you for making such a terrible joke," declared Evelyn.

"You're taking a mean advantage of us at the table, Dick," said Joyce, "though I can't say I think smokestacks are very romantic, either. But trust Evelyn to find a romance anywhere! Why, the other day, when we went to the canning factory, she said the piles of tin cans looked like knights in armor!"

"Never mind," said Evelyn stoutly, "when we got back to class I remembered how to make a jar air-tight, and you didn't."

Though not everyone would have had Evelyn's ideas of romance, anyone would have enjoyed either exploring or learning with the merry party that she and Joyce joined that afternoon. The domestic science class at Clifton included a large group of jolly girls, and not the least attractive were the seven Linger-Nots.

Besides Priscilla and Dorothy there were Aline Gaines, a rather sharp-featured, dark maiden of fourteen, and her younger sister Virginia, who was nearly thirteen. It had taken only a short acquaintance for Virginia to become violently attached to Joyce, and a faithful admirer of Evelyn. This was certainly a case of the attraction of opposites, for Virginia, a pale, childish little girl was as harum-scarum as Joyce and Evelyn were well-balanced. Virginia and Joyce had formed a three-cornered

friendship with a sedate damsel of thirteen named Muriel Ives, who was known as "Mousey" because she hardly ever talked. She was as popular, however, as good listeners always are.

There were two other girls in the group, Helena Hawthorne and Rose Willing. Helena was very tall and well-formed for her fourteen years, and had a beautiful fair complexion. She wore a very stylish gray fall suit with a satin hat to match. But though she was extremely pretty, Evelyn thought Rose more interesting.

Rose was the eldest of the Linger-Nots, being fifteen years old. She was tall, thin, and dark, with a pale, clear ivory skin and black hair. Her eyes were gray, and very clear, and her expression, though serious, very sweet. Evelyn noticed that all the girls, except possibly Helena, treated Rose with real affection, even though she seemed slightly formal with them.

The chaperon of the party was Miss Langdon, one of the most popular of the teachers at the Clifton School. She was unexpectedly accompanying the party, for the domestic science teacher, who had arranged the excursion, had been unable to come at the last moment. Miss Langdon was Evelyn's class teacher, and she had a real enthusiasm for excursions unknown,

apparently, to most teachers, so Evelyn felt quite at ease with her.

"I'm so glad we're going over to see the other shore of our river," she confided, with a feeling that she would be understood, as they thundered under the river in the subway. "I've always wanted to see that side, and to look at our side from over there."

"Both sides are as interesting as they can be, and they always have been," declared Miss Langdon.

Evelyn was pleased with this corroboration, and also with an incident which happened as the girls were all walking up to the bakery from the station. On their way past one of the tall office buildings that lined the street, a door suddenly opened, and out stepped two lovely maidens in white frocks with low necks and short sleeves, blue silk socks and little slippers, and their hair in ringlets. They had the sweetest of smiles on their rosy faces. They made haste to step into a waiting automobile, and were borne swiftly off.

"Acting for the movies," said Helena the experienced. "There's the camera man."

"Yes, that building's one of our most famous studios," said Miss Langdon.

"Oh, how romantic!" cried Joyce, and then, in some confusion, sought to avoid Evelyn's twinkling eye.

In the great bakery the girls saw cookies cut out a hundred at a time, and then, with a rhythmic swing, almost as if to music, shot into an oven and baked. They were told that four hundred kinds of crackers alone were made every day, and it seemed as if they were invited to sample every kind. They passed through rooms that looked literally like a fairyland of frost-flowers, made of thousands of iced cakes drying on long rows of hooks across the ceiling. In the basement they found railroad tracks and a train, a dock and a ship tied alongside, waiting for shipments. Even Joyce finally admitted a certain romance about smokestacks before the visit was over.

"Let's go home by the ferry," suggested Aline. "There's no need to hurry, and we can get the fresh air that way. It's nearer home for most of us, too. Miss Langdon, is it convenient for you?"

"Yes, indeed, I can get a car there that goes right past my door. I'd love to go that way! It's so interesting," answered Miss Langdon, with the enthusiasm which made her such a favorite with the girls.

Down to the ferry the party accordingly made its way, with Joyce, Virginia, and Muriel skipping along in the lead. Dorothy and Priscilla were as usual inseparable, and Aline and Helena accompanied the lively young teacher.

Evelyn was thus left by herself, but only for a moment. Almost immediately Rose Willing, who had been walking along by Priscilla, glanced around, saw Evelyn, and fell back into step beside her.

"We had a good excursion to-day," she observed.

"Aren't they usually good?" asked Evelyn.

"The things we go to see are all right. It depends on whom we go with to see them. Now, Miss Langdon always can make things go, and yet she doesn't act as if she knew everything and thought the girls were terribly ignorant, the way lots of teachers do. She does know ever so much herself, too, though she graduated from college only last year."

"She makes the English class very interesting," said Evelyn.

"Oh, yes, you have her in the eighth, don't you? Well, she knows all about games, and sports, and entertainments, and interesting things like those, besides lessons."

"I remember the first day I came to school, she spoke in the assembly about the Hallowe'en party we're going to have."

"Yes, she loves to help the girls get things up, all the time. So you have just come to Clifton; aren't you one of the girls that moved into the house on the parkway a little while ago?"

"Yes, and that's my sister," replied Evelyn,

indicating Joyce, who, to the pleasure of her two companions, had just discovered three unexpected crackers lingering in the depths of her pocket.

"I'm the only girl in this crowd that hasn't any sister or brother," commented Rose, as the party entered the ferry-house. "I have just my father and mother, and I live in a museum, just like a curiosity!"

Rose laughed heartily over her little joke, and so did Evelyn. So also did Helena, who was directly behind them in the ticket-line and overheard the remark, but to Evelyn her laugh sounded like a disagreeable titter rather than friendly amusement, and she glanced anxiously at Rose to see if she, too, had noticed it. Rose gave no sign of having heard it, however, and Evelyn was relieved, for it was the only unpleasant thing that had happened all afternoon. Otherwise the affair had been perfect.

"Hurry up, hurry up!" cried Dorothy, in the rear. "We don't want to have to sit inside! Out on deck for us!"

Aboard the ferryboat the party made a dash for the front deck, only to find, to their amusement, that they had it entirely to themselves. None of the other passengers seemed to care for October breezes off the East River, and remained cosily inside the cabin.

"I hope I'll never get so old and foolish I

don't like fresh air," observed Virginia complacently, leaning over the rail as the boat pulled out of the slip, the better to observe a little motorboat that was scudding past.

As she spoke, the ferryboat gave a sudden turn to the right into the teeth of the wind, and the next moment her scarlet felt hat with its long curly black quill was spinning lightly along the waves.

"Jinny!" cried Aline, snatching her adventurous younger sister back from the rail, "there goes your hat that you got only last week! It may be a good long time till you're old, but you don't need to wait to be foolish!"

"I'm sorry," said Virginia, calmly gazing at her dancing headgear, "but it's only my second-best hat, and I always did hate it, anyway. I'd just as leave wear my tam. Oh, look at it jump!"

It was undoubtedly jumping in the liveliest manner in the midst of a little current of white-caps that flowed rapidly in the middle of an otherwise rather calm stream. All the girls except Aline were rather entertained by it, but she was trying rather too hard to impress on Virginia the undeniable fact that hats cost money. Miss Langdon thought it wise to intervene.

"Of course the hat jumps!" she laughed, "for it's right in the middle of the place where

the Harlem and the East River rush together, and makes this violent current which people still call Hell Gate. It used to be very dangerous here for ships.”

“Is it now?” asked Muriel.

“Oh, no, indeed. It was the high rocks which made it dangerous, and most of them have been blasted out. Some people always knew the channel, though, even when the rocks were here, and there’s a story of a man who rowed a boat straight through Hell Gate in order to get a sailor aboard his ship, which was waiting on the other side. It was a French sailor, whose ship was being chased by an English vessel, and the really strange thing about the story is that the sailor was swept off the yard-arm of his ship on the lawn of the Jaffrey House by an overhanging tree!”

“Why, the idea!” cried Aline, forgetting all about the iniquities of Virginia. “And there’s the Jaffrey House now, standing on the point! How pretty it looks, with the park around it just like private grounds!”

The girls looked up at the old yellow house with interest. It fronted the point exactly, and its walls were as square as the sides of a band-box, but it had a very homelike air, and its very plainness gave it a certain dignity. Its only ornaments were a wide porch and a deep, slop-

ing red roof, which was ornamental as well as useful because of its shape and size.

The spectators on the ferryboat had an excellent view of the old house, for the channel in which the boat ran was very crooked, bearing witness to the historic reputation of the passage. The boat turned again to the right, proceeded some distance upstream, turned to the left and doubled on her course as she approached the opposite shore, and slowly swung all the way around the point to find her slip.

"What a deep roof that house has!" said Dorothy. "It's nearly as deep as a third story. Is there only an attic under it, Rose?"

"Yes, it's just an attic with one window," answered Rose. "I've been there only once. At present it's full of donations, which have to stay there until they can be unpacked and arranged in the museum. Father and his assistants are working as fast as they can, but there are trunkfuls of stuff up there."

"A treasure-house under the scarlet roof!" said Miss Langdon. "What a thing it is to have that house left to give us an idea of the time when both sides of this river were covered with country estates! We don't realize what a place of romance we're living in. When I look at that roof of yours, Rose, I think there must be a library of stories under it."

It looked indeed as if the scarlet roof was

built to provide immense storage space, for its appearance made it seem almost to be built in two stories. The top one, it was true, was very small, and seemed as if put on for extra protection, sloping back gradually from the overhanging eaves. The whole effect was very quaint and attractive, as it made the square house look rather like one of the toy houses in a child's miniature village.

The pilot's warning-bell rang, the boat bumped into her slip, the deckhands leaped ashore and flung themselves on the mooring-ropes, and the fresh-air party on the deck were the first to step ashore from the boat.

After seeing Miss Langdon on board her car, the girls separated.

"Let's go and get some soda," said Virginia to Joyce and Muriel. "I know a new place where ice-cream soda is only ten cents!"

Evidently the reckless Virginia had her own way of being thrifty. Aline looked more approving than at any time since the luckless hat had vanished, and announced that she would go too. Thereupon Virginia offered to stop at home on the way to the new candy-store, and don her tam, in order to make the party more respectable in appearance, and the four girls moved off in great harmony.

Dorothy and Helena went off together to study for a history examination, Priscilla cried

out that her music teacher would be tearing out his hair by handfuls if she did not reach home in exactly two minutes, and fled down the street. Evelyn was again left with Rose, and the two girls strolled slowly down Willett Parkway together.

"Have you been over to see the museum, Evelyn?" asked Rose.

"No, not yet," replied Evelyn, "but I hope to, soon. What sort of collections have you there?"

"All sorts of interesting objects connected with early American life and customs," answered Rose. "Father has just five rooms completed so far, for it's rather a new museum, you know. I suppose the girls told you that a patriotic society owns all the things. It's called the Old Landmark Society, and father's their curator. We have some wonderful furniture and china, and special curiosities, too, like a pair of Washington's spurs, and a pirate's saber that Decatur brought home from Tripoli with him. And in the attic, in the trunks that I spoke of, father says there are the most beautiful dresses and embroideries. I just can't wait to see them!"

"How perfectly glorious to have so many things like that around you all the time!" cried Evelyn, with sparkling eyes. "Aren't you lucky, Rose!"

“Then you like such things, too, do you?”

“Oh, yes, I love them, though I have never seen so very many, but whenever I do, I feel almost as if I knew the people who used them. Things like those all tell stories,” said Evelyn enthusiastically.

“I never get tired of them, though I’ve been used to them all my life,” said Rose, “because, you see, my father’s business is to take care of such things. If you like them too I’d be glad to have you come and see me on Friday afternoon and I’ll show you over the whole museum. See, here’s where I live.”

She stopped in front of the northern entrance to Willett Park, where a flagged walk winding through the trees led to the wide rear door of the Jaffrey House.

“You go right up those steps and ring the bell,” she added. “We live on the second floor, where those curtains are. I don’t know what you’ll think of our—shall I say, apartment? At any rate, it’s interesting! It was the extra guest-wing in the old days.”

“I’d love to see it,” said Evelyn, “and Friday will suit me perfectly. Thank you so much, Rose.”

“All right,” called Rose, as she went up the path, “come early, and I’ll show you all the dungeons and ghosts!”

CHAPTER III

UNDER THE FOUR RED CHIMNEYS

FRIDAY afternoon was wet and windy, but Evelyn mounted the rear steps of the Jaffrey House in high spirits. Rose answered her ring promptly, and at once led her up a narrow, straight flight of stairs, placed close beside the door, to the second story.

"First you must come and see where we live," said Rose, "and then we'll go through the museum."

The stairs ended in a narrow hall that ran parallel to the rear wall of the house. Five small, white-paneled doors were ranged along one side of the hall, and evidently opened into the rooms with the curtained windows which Rose had pointed out to Evelyn the afternoon of the excursion. The largest of these doors, the one at the far end of the hall, Rose threw hospitably open, showing a pleasant sitting-room which seemed to be nested high in the tossing branches of the trees that could be seen through the large square windows on two sides of the room.

A lady who looked for all the world like Rose except for the fact that her hair was gray, was sitting beside one of the windows sewing. She looked up with a smile as the two girls entered.

"So this is our new neighbor!" she said cordially. "I'm glad to see you, Evelyn. You have chosen a splendid day to come. I mean," she added with a laugh, as an unusually violent gust of wind howled outside, "that there will probably be few visitors here this afternoon, and you and Rose will have the whole museum to yourselves and can examine everything as much as you like."

"I know I shall enjoy it," answered Evelyn. "What fun it must be to live here!"

"We spend most of our time going in and out of doors, as Rose will show you," said Mrs. Willing merrily, "but otherwise it's quite romantic!"

"Come and see what mother means," invited Rose, leading Evelyn into the hall again, and opening the next door.

"This is our dining-room," she announced, ushering Rose into a small but prettily furnished room, "and you are now looking, Evelyn, on our one door of communication! It was especially put in for us."

She indicated a modern swinging door of dark wood, to match the dining-room woodwork, which was set in the far wall.

"We just said we couldn't carry every single teaspoon and butterplate from the kitchen next door out into the hall and back into this room! So the society gave us that door."

"I should hope so!" said Evelyn. "But why don't these rooms communicate, Rose?"

"Because they were used only as extra guest-rooms," explained Rose. "You know at the time this house was built, people entertained a great deal, and this house was built as the Jaffreys' summer home, but even so, they seldom used this wing, as the house is so large. It was really just for emergencies, when there were great numbers of guests. I hope it was more convenient for the guests than it is for us. It certainly must have been private."

"How nice to know about the people who lived here first!" said Evelyn, following Rose down the narrow hall. "How did you find out about them?"

"Why, father once wrote a book about the family histories of a number of old American families," answered Rose, "and the Jaffrey family was one of them. But there's really very little known about them, except that the original Jaffrey was one of our first shipbuilders. They always lived very quietly, and then I believe they lived abroad for a good many years. Here is my room, Evelyn."

Situated at the other end of the hall from the

sitting-room, Rose's apartment corresponded to the former in shape, though it was considerably smaller. The furniture was unlike anything Evelyn had ever seen, being made of gracefully shaped lightweight mahogany, very old-fashioned but pleasing, for each piece had whimsical little ornaments which gave it an air of individuality. The bedstead had curious bits of carving which seemed to dance on the head and footboards, the rocking-chair had the longest and most tapering rockers, surely, that were ever made, and the tall pile of bureau-drawers glittered with many-faceted glass knobs which served as handles. On one side of the room was a large brick fireplace, jutting far out on the floor. The old-fashioned wainscoting resembled the furniture in tint, and the harmonizing color-scheme carried out in the whole apartment was enhanced by the light which fell from the south and west windows through rose-garlanded curtains. Altogether, it was an unusual room, but one that was highly appropriate to Rose, and Evelyn exclaimed with delight:

"How pretty! Where did you get such lovely furniture?"

"Father found it once in an old store downtown. His work takes him to places like that all the time. But the things aren't really valuable, for they aren't very old. They're just

quaint," explained Rose. "Now, you must have seen enough of the Willing residence! Let's go to the museum. There are just five rooms arranged so far, but the collection will fill the whole house some day."

As she talked, she led the way back to the head of the narrow staircase up which the girls had come, where the hall turned and ran through to the front of the house. A large white staircase with a square landing halfway down, and a beautifully carved banister with a flat railing of dark polished wood, led down to the main hall.

Off this six rooms opened. The smallest of these, directly beside the front door, was the curator's office, and in it Evelyn caught sight of two clerks working at their desks. Opposite the office was a large room filled with the wonderful old American china and furniture of which Rose had spoken. Next came a whole roomful of gorgeous silk and satin gowns in Colonial and Empire styles. The two girls lingered a long time over the wonderful yellow and lavender brocades, and the marvelously embroidered silk shawls.

"Here's where the ladies wore those things, perhaps," suggested Rose, flinging open the large door in the center of the hall, at the back of the house.

"The ball-room!" cried Evelyn. "Oh, what a floor!"

"This room is going to be left as it is," said Rose. "The Society thinks it would be a pity to fill it with exhibits, when the walls are so beautiful. Father worked a long time getting the panels restored."

The panels to which she referred were of white satin with a design in gold, and they were set in gilt frames along the walls and between the windows. A mirror about a foot high was set in the wainscoting all the way around the room.

"That was to show the ladies' slippers and trains," explained Rose, as the idea of comparing the different periods came into her mind. "Isn't it wonderful! The girls liked lovely things then just as they do now."

"And they had pretty things too," added Evelyn. "The draperies gave them a chance to be not only pretty but graceful, as all the old paintings show."

Rose sighed as the vision passed before her.

"I suppose," she commented, "that the world doesn't get better, it merely changes."

"I do wonder where father is," she suddenly exclaimed. "Oh, I guess he must be in the ship room. That's next door."

The small ship room was a curious place furnished only with glass showcases, small ones

arranged in rows along the walls, and large ones standing on the floor. They were all filled with models of sailing ships. Some were three-masted vessels with sail full set, others were frigates and fishing-schooners, and still others men-of-war, as was evident from the cannon peeping through the sides. Before one case which contained a model of a saucy little brig stood an elderly gentleman with very white hair and a kindly, interesting face. He was peering anxiously at the bow of the ship.

"Father, dear, this is my friend Evelyn Barry, come over from the parkway to see the museum," cried Rose, advancing into the room.

"How do you do?" inquired Mr. Willing, shaking hands with Evelyn with a stately, old-fashioned bow that was very flattering.

Then he turned to Rose.

"My dear daughter," he said in a rather distressed tone, "I am afraid that the yard-arm on this model has been jarred loose by that very incompetent expressman who brought in this donation yesterday. Actually, he *threw* it down on my desk!"

"It's not much damaged, father," answered Rose, examining the ship. "I'll get your glue, and you can fix it right away. Just think: he might easily have thrown it from the top of his wagon to the sidewalk!"

"My daughter is of great help to me," ex-

plained Mr. Willing to Evelyn as Rose ran into the office. He spoke with considerable relief, and quite as if she were a grown-up person instead of a girl his daughter's age. "She always thinks of such things as glue, for instance."

"It must be hard to think of things like—like glue," answered Evelyn, a little confused by his manner, and then still more so to find that she had ended her sentence in so extraordinary a way. But Mr. Willing was looking so hard at the model that at first she thought he had forgotten her.

"True," he answered suddenly, rather to her embarrassment, "and yet, such details are very important, especially in the case of such things as these ships, which the Society is very fortunate to have. They are especially appropriate as an exhibit in this house."

"Do you mean because Mr. Jaffrey was a shipbuilder?"

"Partly," said Mr. Willing, looking pleased at Evelyn's intelligent question; "the Jaffrey ships went all over the world. Then, too, every type of ship known in a century or more has passed this famous observation point at the junction of the two rivers, merchantmen and warships both, and a great naval battle was expected here once, in the War of 1812, though it never took place."

At this interesting point, Rose came back with the glue-pot.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mr. Willing, "now your poor father will be happy for some time! But I'm sure there are things here more interesting to young ladies than ship models are. Has your friend seen our curiosities?"

"Not yet," replied Rose, "let's go next door and look at them, Evelyn."

As they left the room, she continued:

"Father will be perfectly happy now! You see, he's planning a book on 'Famous American Fighting Ships,' and he spends his time examining those models whenever he has any leisure. Now, this room is the Curiosity Room. So far it's the best in the museum. Maybe by and by there will be something better upstairs, but the second floor isn't arranged yet. We've only just got the painters out of the assembly-room. The Society is going to have one of the rooms fitted up for a lecture hall, you know. But whatever they do, I'll always like this room best."

The room was literally filled with treasures. Beautiful old American silver—cups, porringers, and spoons—glittered beside a pair of Benjamin Franklin's brass andirons and a gold locket containing some of Lafayette's hair. There was a splendid collection of historic medals ordered struck by Congress, and one wall

of the room was covered with wonderfully embroidered samplers.

"Come and look at this one in the middle," said Rose. "It's my favorite. Just think, it was made by a girl who lived in this house. 'It's our one souvenir of the Jaffrey family.'"

"Really?" asked Evelyn. "Who was she?"

"Esther Jaffrey, the daughter of the man who built it. She made this in 1814, when she was sixteen."

"Why, she's put the house on it," said Evelyn, coming close to the sampler and examining it with interest. "How natural it looks—see the smoke coming out of the chimney!"

"Yes, and I suppose the flowers grew in her garden," said Rose, "and she must have made up the verse herself."

"I thought real samplers always had alphabets, though. There's just the verse here."

"Oh, if she was sixteen when she made it, it must have been the twentieth she had done!" said Rose. "They started girls doing those things as soon as they could talk, in those days. I guess they let her off from the alphabet that time."

"It's very pretty, anyway," said Evelyn.

The sampler was on light brown linen, but the unfading dyes of a century ago still showed the careful stitches in the square yellow house with its red roof, and the graceful border of

various flowers was a brilliant combination of green, red, and purple. The quaint stanza read:

“Esther Jaffrey is my name.
I, a maid of quiet fame,
Have this flowered sampler wrought—
Mixed my zest and skill with thought,—
That the world might understand
How I loved my native land,
Loved my home and city, too.
Maids who read, be also true!”

“Look, Rose,” said Evelyn, whose eye had caught sight of an x and z in close conjunction. “I believe Esther did put in every letter of the alphabet, after all. Yes, she did!”

“Then they didn’t let her off!” sighed Rose. “Oh, those poor girls!”

After a pleasant half-hour among the curiosities the two girls were about to return upstairs, when there was a sharp ring at the doorbell, and Rose, going to the door, admitted Priscilla, dripping with rain.

“Hello, Rose,” she said, “I’m not going to stop. I’m just bringing back the book you lent me—why, there’s Evelyn!”

“Yes, she’s been here all afternoon,” answered Rose. “Come upstairs, Prissy, and let’s find some food. Aren’t you starving?”

“I always am,” declared Priscilla mourn-

fully, "but I didn't mean to invite myself to your party, even so!"

However, she was prevailed to mount the stairs, and Rose "found" materials for a pitcher of lemonade, as well as a platter of cookies.

"I was so surprised to see you because I was going to stop at your house on my way back," said Priscilla to Evelyn. "I wanted to see you specially. Rose knows why, don't you, Rose?"

Rose, busy assuaging the pangs of starvation, nodded solemnly from the midst of a cookie.

"The girls want me to ask you and Joyce to join our club. They elected you both at the last meeting."

"Oh, Priscilla, I'd just love to join!" cried Evelyn, enthusiastically. "And so would Joyce, I'm sure—she goes around with Virginia and Muriel all the time, now. It's lovely of the girls to ask us—and so soon!"

"We meet Monday afternoons at each other's houses," explained Priscilla, "and so you and Joyce must come to Dorothy's next Monday. It will be a very important meeting, for we're going to give our first play in the spring, and we must start deciding about it soon. Miss Langdon says she will help us."

"Everybody will want something different," prophesied Rose, darkly.

“Oh, they always do at first,” said experienced President Priscilla cheerfully, “but the thing to do is to let them all talk and have something absolutely new and gorgeous all ready to spring on them, and then they all forget what they wanted, and want *that!*”

“It is no wonder, Priscilla,” laughed Rose, “that you always inspire confidence! You know human nature and how to forgive as well as to satisfy. That’s some education!”

CHAPTER IV

THE LINGER-NOTS MEET

ON Monday afternoon the living-room of Dorothy's house in the "back alley" presented a lively scene. Soon after three o'clock all the nine Linger-Nots were comfortably squeezed into it, for nobody minded a little crowding in an important cause. To preserve the dignity of her office, Priscilla, as presiding officer, was prevailed on to take the Morris chair, a doubtful honor, as she could not preside leaning back, and so was obliged to sit upright without any support. Aline, who was secretary, occupied another chair beside the table, in order to keep her minutes, but all the other girls distributed themselves cosily on the couch, in the window-seats, on hassocks, and on the floor, laughing and chattering merrily.

"Girls," began Priscilla promptly, "we've got to work to-day and work hard, so the meeting will please come right to order, and talk afterwards! Will the secretary please read the minutes?"

Aline rose impressively, and read from her note-book:

“At the last meeting of the Linger-Not Club, the secretary was instructed to reply to the invitation of the Women’s Block Committee, asking if the girls would take a number on the program of the entertainment being given to raise money to buy new books for the Children’s Room in the Public Library, and thank the Committee for the invitation, and say that the club would be happy to accept it by giving a piece called ‘Eight Bells,’ about ten minutes long”——

At this point Aline was absolutely obliged to pause for breath, and the club impolitely snickered.

“Aline’s sentences are as long as the piece,” murmured Dorothy to Evelyn.

“This piece was suggested by Helena Hawthorne,” continued Aline, “and consists of tableaux with music. The rest of the meeting was taken up with choosing parts for each girl, after which the meeting adjourned.”

Evelyn, glancing admiringly at Helena, who seemed to have good ideas, was struck with the fact that the originator of this delightful contribution to the entertainment program looked remarkably sulky. Dorothy intercepted her glance.

“Helena’s awfully mad about the way the

parts went," she whispered, under cover of the noise made by accepting the minutes. "She wanted the best one herself, and the girls all said Rose must have it because she would do it better. Wait till you see the rehearsal afterwards!"

"Dorothy!" came from Priscilla. "The treasurer's report, *please!* I've called for it three times!"

"Certainly, but there's not much to report," answered Dorothy, scrambling up from the floor while the other girls laughed at her, "there is—are?—is—oh, bother!—we have twenty-seven cents in the treasury!"

"Oh, dear!" cried Priscilla, for once startled out of her presidential calm, while the other girls sat open-mouthed. "Is that all? What became of the four dollars we had last week?"

"I paid it out to the girls who made the candy for the sale," explained Dorothy. "You know we decided to furnish the materials from the treasury. All the items are here in my book. I never knew it would cost so much, but, anyway, we made a lot of money, seven dollars and a half."

"That's all very nice for the Junior Red Cross," cried Helena, "but what can we ever do with twenty-seven cents? It's terrible to be so poor, and extravagant, too!"

"If you and some of the other girls would

pay up your back dues, we wouldn't be poor!" cried Dorothy, wounded at the implication against her stewardship. "If I hadn't been careful, the club would be in debt! If you think it's easy to buy refreshments every week for seven girls that eat as much as you do, on dues of five cents a week, and have anything left over, you can be treasurer!"

"Girls," cried Priscilla, "you're both out of order! Helena, you mustn't criticize the report till its acceptance is moved! Dorothy, you mustn't ever make personal remarks in a meeting!"

"All right, I'm sorry," said Dorothy promptly, for though she was hasty, she was always honest enough to apologize for a fault. Helena, however, turned up her nose with dignity and gazed at a corner of the ceiling without a word. Rose promptly threw herself into the breach caused by this embarrassing situation, and moved the acceptance of the treasurer's report. When it had passed, she spoke again:

"Madam President, I move that all the members who owe back dues be asked to pay them up to date at the end of the meeting."

"Hurrah! I second the motion!" cried Dorothy.

It was promptly carried, though Evelyn noticed that Helena did not vote.

"Now I think we ought to talk over our big play that we want to give in the spring," announced Priscilla. "We're all supposed to have thought of ideas to suggest to-day, so let's each say what we'd like."

"I think it would be awfully nice to give an operetta," said Aline, "something like the one the eighth grade gave at Christmas."

"But none of us can sing fit to be heard except Helena," objected Dorothy. "We can't have it all choruses and soprano solos! Now I thought of a singing-school, where you don't have to sing well, because it's just funny."

"Oh, we don't want our play to be *funny*!" protested Rose, and for the first time that afternoon, Helena agreed with someone else's remark, and seconded Rose promptly:

"No. I think our first play ought to be serious—and *good*, don't you know."

"We could have a minstrel show," proposed Virginia, in entire good faith. "The jokes never are funny—and I'd just love to black up!"

The girls shouted with laughter. Helena, however, looked disdainful.

"How can you be so silly, Jinny! This is what comes of having kids like you in the club. You mean well, but you're not old enough to have sense."

Virginia looked perplexed and abashed, and

Aline, who had at first looked at her young sister with an expression exactly like Helena's, now rushed to her defense.

"Nonsense! She didn't mean any harm. And if she's old enough to have the very first scene in 'Eight Bells,' she's old enough to be in the club, I guess!"

"All I mean is, that our play ought to be sort of romantic and historic—grown-up, you know," explained Helena hastily, rather startled by this slightly personal attack.

Priscilla, with a sigh of relief, snatched at this excellent idea, and hastened to steer the play from the shoals whither it was headed.

"I think so too," she agreed, "and I believe if we went to the library and told the librarian what we wanted, maybe she could find us the right sort of play."

No objection was offered to this very sensible proposal, but further suggestion languished.

"We ought to get everybody's opinion," said Priscilla, a little desperately. "Evelyn, what do you think we ought to give?"

"Oh, I've just come," replied Evelyn, shyly, "I don't believe I know."

"Never mind, I'm sure you have a good idea," encouraged Priscilla.

"Well—so long as we're going to the library to look for plays, I wonder if we couldn't see if there wasn't some historical one about this

place we live in. I think it would be interesting if we could act something that really happened here, for lots of exciting things must have."

The girls began to look interested.

"You see," continued Evelyn, forgetting to be shy as she warmed to her subject, "there's the Jaffrey family, whose ships went all over the world. Then there's the river, and the bay, and Hell Gate, and the War of 1812, and that wonderful old house that's the museum—don't you believe there must be some plays about those things?"

Her listeners were electrified by this new idea, but none more so than Virginia, who jumped up, and waving her arms up and down, cried:

"What a *grand* idea! And listen, girls! Make Evelyn write the play! We don't want a stale old thing from the library. She can write something much better, that will be new!"

"Why, Evelyn," cried Priscilla, as all the girls stared in admiration at the astounded authoress, "can you really write a play? Honestly?"

Evelyn was so bewildered that she could not answer. Never yet had she mentioned to a single one of the girls her fondness for writing. How had little Virginia, the most heedless of

them all, ever discovered it? And then the reason dawned on her.

"Oh, Joyce!" she cried, blushing as red as a beet, "did you show anyone something I wrote? How could you?"

"Why, I showed Jinny and Mousey *Alicia's Sword*," said Joyce, with innocent pride, "because you left it open on your desk the day they were over at the house, and you always let me read your things, and they thought it was splendid! Didn't you, girls?"

"Perfectly wonderful!" proclaimed Virginia, and Muriel, breaking her customary silence, murmured:

"It was simply great. Do write our play, Evelyn!"

"Well, why don't you, for pity's sake, if you can?" demanded Dorothy. "If I had brains enough, I would, but I couldn't advise the club to wait for that!"

"Could you really write it about the Jaffrey House? I wish you would!" said Rose.

"You must!" declared Aline. "So that's settled."

"If Evelyn could write a special play for our club, I think it would be perfectly splendid!" said Priscilla with enthusiasm. "And I'm not a bit surprised to hear you write stories and things, Evelyn, because you always write such

good compositions. Miss Langdon reads them all the time."

"Maybe she'd help me with the play," said Evelyn. "I never wrote anything for so many people before."

"Let's ask her to meet with us some time soon, and give us some hints," suggested Helena, making a good point as usual. "A play like that will be something new, and will give everybody a good part."

As Priscilla had predicted, all the girls had united on a new idea.

Helena's last remark made Evelyn think of Dorothy's comment on Helena's feeling about her part in the tableaux, for the rehearsal of which the girls now began to make ready. Some of them cleared a space on the floor beside the piano, and some went upstairs to Dorothy's room to get the costumes. Evelyn and Joyce, who were of course not in the performance as they had just joined the Linger-Nots, were requested to act as audience and critics, and assigned to seats on the sofa.

"Joyce," whispered Evelyn, "why did you tell about my plays? I was so embarrassed."

"You got over it," answered the philosophic Joyce. "I knew you would. I told because I wanted the girls to know. They ought to—and didn't they like it? Don't you see, Evelyn, you have the brains, but I have the sense!"

Anyway, it was Virginia who really told, and she wanted the girls to know, too, because she likes you so much. She says you're always nice to her, even if she is a kid. Aline and Helena do pick on her the whole time, you know."

The subject of the conversation now pranced in, with her hat on her head, a pile of books in a strap swinging from one hand, and a lunch-eon-basket on her arm.

"Here's the School Belle," she announced. "Orchestra, please!"

Priscilla rushed to the piano, and Helena, standing near by, began to sing "School-Days" as Priscilla played the accompaniment, and Virginia posed in the space that had been cleared.

Helena certainly had a voice that was "fit to be heard," as Dorothy had so modestly expressed it, for it was clear, sweet, and of wide range, and she sang easily and with an evident happiness in doing so which Evelyn had never before seen in the girl's rather mocking face. The "audience" applauded generously at the end of the tableau, and all three performers looked much gratified.

Dorothy appeared next as the "Dinner Belle," in a large apron borrowed from the cook, and carrying a monster dinner-bell such as is rarely seen since the advent of gongs. Helena sang a merry verse for her, and another

for Muriel, who was the "Cow Belle," in a striking Wild Western costume adapted from a khaki skirt trimmed with fringe, a campaign hat, gauntlets, a riding-whip, and realistic lasso made out of the Ives family clothes-line.

Priscilla and Helena now vanished, and Aline took their places, and gave two recitations which accompanied the next two Belles. Priscilla, in a white apron and coif with red crosses, could be nothing but an "Ambulance Belle," while Dorothy, appearing again, in her college brother's tortoise-shell spectacles, long overcoat, and derby hat on her bobbed locks, with an immense bouquet in one hand and a candy-box in the other, was a "Door-Bell" which would have announced a caller welcome anywhere. Her gentlemanly efforts won hearty applause.

Then Priscilla came back, and played soft music for the last group of the Belles. Helena appeared, decked in furs sprinkled with paper snow-flakes, and the tinkling of the piano under Priscilla's skillful fingers assured the listeners that this was none other than the "Sleigh Belle." Aline was the "Church Belle," and her soft blue and white draperies were arranged to resemble those of a stained-glass figure. The climax came when Rose appeared as the "Wedding Belle," in a white bridal costume and long

veil, which her tall figure and dark beauty showed off to great effect.

"The veil is a window-curtain, really," confided Virginia, who had been watching the tableaux from the sofa beside Joyce, on the conclusion of her own performance. "Isn't Rose sweet? I'm glad Helena didn't get that part, even if she did think of having 'Eight Bells,' because her sister took part in a show like it once. She's too fat to be a bride. She wanted the 'Wedding Belle' because her hair is yellow, and some of the girls did agree with her that the bride ought to be fair, but they all voted for Rose!"

"She sings beautifully," said Evelyn generously, "and she has fine ideas."

"Oh, yes," admitted Virginia, "if she only could be nice to people, she really would be—nice, you know."

"Now, girls," cried Dorothy, bustling in once more, this time in the rôle of hostess, with a large bowl of red apples, "let's have something to eat and then let's go out in the garden."

Out they promptly went. Straiton Court garden was a delightful place even in late fall, with its tall cypress trees, leafless brown bushes with tiny red berries, and wide walks winding through the fading grass. It was so cold that Dorothy soon started a game of tag, gave them all a terrific chase, and before long ran down

Helena, who, as Virginia had hinted, was rather plump, and did not get over the ground very speedily.

Rose and Evelyn stopped, breathless, beside one of the cypresses.

"Have you had a good time?" gasped Rose.

"Glorious!" answered Evelyn, choking.

"I think we're going to do wonderful things."

"Splendid!"

A swift hand descended suddenly on Evelyn's shoulder. Helena had stolen up behind her unaware.

"Tag! You're it!" cried Helena triumphantly. "Catch me!"

"That's easy!" cried Evelyn, turning on her. But it wasn't.

Helena laughed, dodged behind a bench, and escaped. She was good at dodging.

CHAPTER V

HELENA MAKES AN IMPRESSION

THE Thanksgiving holidays brought a short halt in the Linger-Nots' numerous activities. Indeed, Evelyn had not seen any of the girls for two or three days. Priscilla and Dorothy had gone out of town on visits, Rose was spending most of her time helping her father make a card catalogue of a new room in the museum which was soon to be opened, and the other girls had been busy with their mothers doing necessary shopping and dressmaking.

"This will be a good chance to go over to the library and look over some of this list of books that Miss Langdon suggested might give us ideas for the play," thought Evelyn, the last afternoon of the holidays. "I'll look at a lot of them, and bring the best ones home to read carefully."

At once she put on her long blue serge coat trimmed with beaver, and her beaver cap, found her library ticket, and set forth.

The library was only three streets south of her home. It was a fine four-story building of gray stone, with a large collection of books, various reading-rooms, and a whole floor, the second, given up entirely to young folks. The librarian in charge of the second floor knew Evelyn, and, indeed, all the members of the club, very well, for all the girls drew books and frequently met one another in the big, pleasant room.

"You'll be all alone this afternoon," she said with the merry glance that always twinkled behind her big tortoise-shell rimmed glasses. "I haven't seen one of the Linger-Nots this whole vacation."

"Oh, I haven't time to talk to them just now," replied Evelyn importantly. "You see, Miss Phillips, we're going to give a play, and they want me to write it, and I have to read all the books on this list to find things to put in. Of course, I'm going to make up the story, but it must be about something that happened in our neighborhood—a historical story, you know. I thought I would see if I could write something about Esther Jaffrey. Do you know who she was?"

"You mean the girl who lived in the old Jaffrey House?" asked Miss Phillips. "I think that's a fine idea, Evelyn, to write a play about another girl just your own age who lived

a hundred years ago where you do now. I never heard of anyone doing that before."

"I shall write it about her when she was a little older than we are. I think it is more interesting to be older," declared Evelyn.

"Perhaps it is," admitted Miss Phillips politely, with a smile. "Can I help you find those books on your list? Oh, I see! These are all together on the third shelf in the Young People's reference room. They seem to be about life during the War of 1812, don't they? Most people don't know much about that time, Evelyn, so I think perhaps you can write a very interesting play. I'd like to help you any way I can."

The reference room took up one end of the second floor, and was lined with open shelves full of books of information on every conceivable subject. Evelyn piled the contents of the third shelf at one end of the long table surrounded with comfortable chairs, and ornamented with a bowl of little rust-colored chrysanthemums, and sat down to read about the days of Esther Jaffrey.

There was no one else in the room, and Evelyn spent a pleasant hour reading how the Broadway of Esther's time was lighted with whale oil and the houses were heated with wood, although the ladies of fashion wore Paris gowns to the many dinners that were given

constantly to the famous naval heroes of the war. It amused Evelyn particularly to read how some of these ladies, not being considered quite exclusive enough to be admitted as members to the fashionable dancing club, which cost two dollars and a half an evening, formed a club themselves, for which tickets cost three dollars! It was so like some girls at school, who had been refused invitations to their older sisters' dance, and had thereupon got up one of their own with twice as many refreshments, that Evelyn burst out laughing, not knowing that she was no longer alone.

"What's the joke?" inquired a familiar voice.

"Why, hello, Helena!" said Evelyn, looking up in surprise. "I thought you were staying at your aunt's house for the holidays."

"I got back this morning, and had nothing to read, so I came here for a book. I didn't see you, until I heard you laugh and turned around. What are you doing?"

"Reading up things for the play, or, rather, trying to, for I haven't found much yet. However, I have most of the story in my head already, from seeing the house. Miss Langdon thought we'd better act something that likely happened there, rather than try to make it absolutely historic. Of course we can have the costumes just the way they were."

"I see," said Helena, nodding approvingly. "That's a clever idea. What I don't see, though, is how you ever thought of any story from seeing that house. Of course there are old houses that make you think of stories, but I don't think the Jaffrey House is one of them. It ought to be white, and have pillars in front of it, don't you know. Why, that house wasn't built till long after the Revolution, and it's so plain and square—all full of angles, with that enormous heavy roof! It never could have had secret passages to the river, where patriots smuggled arms, or family feuds, or duels, or spies," concluded Helena, with a flight of imagination which rather confused her sentence. "It's just a house where people lived."

"That's all I thought it was," rejoined Evelyn humbly. "The play is only going to be about people who lived there. Honestly, I never thought of a single duel or feud, Helena. Do you think we ought to have some?"

"Bless your heart, no, child!" said Helena with the tone of voice in which she frequently addressed Virginia, as she sank down into one of the chairs at the table and unfastened the black fox collar that set off her fair skin so effectively. She wore a black velvet hat on her golden hair, and Evelyn was much fascinated by her appearance as she leaned forward over the table.

"You write that play just the way you think it ought to be, Evelyn," continued Helena. "I'm sure it will be good. It's funny, though, that you should have had such a good chance to see the Jaffrey House and everything in it, because, before you came, Rose Willing never made advances to any of the girls."

"No, she seems rather lonely," answered Evelyn, innocently falling into Helena's trap.

"Well, of course," said Helena, looking pleased at a chance to talk to an audience, "I suppose perhaps she is, but I don't see just how it can be otherwise, do you?"

Evelyn blinked quite uncomprehendingly at Helena, and that maiden, even more pleased than before, continued:

"Don't you know what I mean?"

"No."

"Did you see Rose's father the day you were over at the museum?"

"Yes, I met him, and her mother, too."

"Mrs. Willing is charming," pronounced Helena, with the air of a judge of charm, "and as for Mr. Willing"—

"Isn't he lovely?" cried Evelyn. "He's so fond of Rose."

"Did you notice anything queer about him?"

"Why, no," answered Evelyn, stiffening a little, as for the first time Helena's manner jarred on her. Criticizing people's parents

seemed hardly the thing. "No, Mr. Willing was just as nice as he could be, and so interesting! Oh, perhaps you mean he seems a little absent-minded. I guess lots of very learned people are."

"Ah-h-h-h! Then you did notice it! You see, the question is, is he really absent-minded?"

Evelyn began to be less fascinated by Helena's appearance, and to wish that she would go away if she intended to talk nonsense. Possibly this thought appeared in her expression, for Helena, determined not to be cheated out of making a sensation, continued promptly:

"It's just as you say, Evelyn, Mr. Willing is very learned. He's studied American history and antiques all his life, and made his business taking care of them. Perhaps you know that one of his special interests is our early naval gunnery, in which Americans made so many inventions."

"Isn't that wonderful?"

"Yes, he's written a book about it. He traveled all up and down the Atlantic States, and went to libraries in all the cities, looking at old documents. And now his book is the only authority there is on some of the inventions, for"—Helena sank her voice to a whisper—"some of the documents have been lost!"

"Well, he couldn't help that, I suppose."

Helena looked annoyed by this sensible theory.

"The funny thing about it is that they were the documents about the shipyards in New York harbor where the biggest vessels of the fleet were fitted out in the War of 1812. Of course they are of no military use whatever, but they're very valuable to antiquarians," said Helena, getting off the word speedily and with the accent quite on the right syllable. "They're worth a lot of money, and nobody knows where they are. They used to be kept in the State Library."

"That's too bad, but so long as they have his book, people know about the shipyards, I suppose," said Evelyn, who was getting a little bored and longed to return to her whale oil and dancing-clubs.

"You know there was a big fire in the State Library a few years ago?" persisted Helena.

"No, was there?"

"Yes. It took place the day that Mr. Willing was there taking notes on those documents," concluded Helena. "Lots of people noticed that."

"Helena Hawthorne! Do you mean to say that he set the State Library on fire and then stole the documents and sold them? I never heard of anything so silly and disgusting!" cried Evelyn in furious indignation.

"Oh, my dear! I never, never said such a thing! How hasty you are!" protested Helena, not a little astonished to see that the quiet Evelyn could get really roused.

"Then what do you mean?"

"Nothing, absolutely, except that it is the disappearance of those documents that makes the mystery about Rose and her family. I'm surprised you never heard of it, for it's really no secret. Mr. Willing has gone on with his work, and most societies are crazy to have him work for them, though no one has ever discovered what became of those papers after the alarm sounded for the fire. He thinks he returned them to the desk, but he can't remember."

"And why not? Because he's so absent-minded, of course," said Evelyn, rather scornfully. "Why, when I met him, he spoke to me and then instantly forgot I was in the room! But how awfully hard for Rose to feel that there is any kind of cloud on her father's reputation! No wonder she tries to help him all she can."

"Oh, Rose!" said Helena disdainfully. "I guess she'll get along all right. She always manages to, somehow. As for helping him, she likes to. You know she's just crazy about collecting and arranging and studying antiques. What she wants to do is to go to college so

that she can specialize in American history so she can fit herself to be a professional antiquarian. Did you ever hear of a girl wanting to do such a queer thing?"

"Do you think she will go to college?"

"Oh, I don't know. Of course the Willings haven't any money, but Rose always seems to get what she wants," replied Helena discontentedly. "It wouldn't be so bad if she wanted anything sensible, but to want to mess with dusty old letters and books and teaspoons that Washington ate rice-pudding with! I don't understand it at all!"

"What do you want to be, Helena?" asked Evelyn with some curiosity.

"I want to be a singer," replied the other girl promptly, losing her discontented and sneering expression. "I don't know if I can be," she added humbly, "but I shall do everything I can to try, at least."

"I hope you can," said Evelyn sympathetically, for while she had not enjoyed most of Helena's conversation, there was something rather pathetic about the girl in spite of her furs and velvet and airs, and she seemed perfectly sincere about her music.

Helena smiled appreciatively, and rose.

"Well, I must run home. Mother will be back soon, and she always likes me to be there when she comes in. I hope you don't think

badly of me for what I told you, Evelyn. I really thought you knew about the Willings, and if I hadn't mentioned it, someone would have, sooner or later."

Evelyn hesitated before replying.

"It's all right as long as it isn't a secret," she answered finally, "and it makes me gladder than ever to be a friend of Rose's because I'm sure she needs friends, and perhaps I can do something for her."

"She seems quite self-sufficient," said Helena. "The only thing I ever saw her take much interest in is this play of yours, and that's because it's about her house, I suppose."

"Oh, I think all the girls will be interested in that," said Evelyn. "I've made up a splendid part for each one. Yours will be very important, Helena!"

"Oh, tell me——"

"No, not till we read it in the meeting."

"All right then, I must go. By-by!" said Helena, and went off with a smile that was quite happy for her.

Evelyn, however, was by no means so happy as she had been when she started on her work in the library. So, with the help of Miss Phillips, she quickly chose two of the best books to take home with her and hurried back to the little red house on the parkway. She would feel better, she was sure, if she could share the

strange story she had heard with a wiser brain than her own.

She found her mother in the living-room, sitting by the window and looking out on the bare trees of the park and the rough gray river of November. Mrs. Barry, always ready to listen interestedly to all that her children had to tell her, heard Evelyn's recital of Helena's tale with close attention.

"Did you ever hear anything so awful, mother?" demanded Evelyn, as she finished. "And yet, somehow or other, I was sorry for Helena, though I'm sure she knows better than to talk so about Rose. But she upset me. I don't want to work on the play any more."

"I wouldn't be upset by a silly story, Evelyn. She told you nothing but that the Willings have some difficulty, which you knew before. It doesn't interfere with your friendship for Rose, does it?"

"Oh, no, and I'm sure all the other girls feel the same way. But Helena needn't be so jealous. She knows better."

"My dear child, of course she does, but at the same time I am glad you followed your instinct and treated her in a friendly way. When people act as badly as you say Helena frequently does, and are disagreeable and jealous, there is nearly always something spe-

cial the matter with them, as there is with Helena."

"Why, what?"

"A very common thing, which you haven't happened to meet before. She is extremely gifted, as you know, but so far she has no means of satisfying her tastes. You know her father is dead. Her mother teaches mathematics in one of the high schools, and they have not much money, so that is why they rent the top floor of the Gaines' big house, and have no real home of their own. I have met Mrs. Hawthorne at the Women's Block Association meetings, and she is very nice indeed, but it is easy to see that she is not satisfied that Helena has to spend so much of her time with her aunt and cousins. The cousins are much older than Helena, and she copies their ideas, which I understand are not always very desirable."

"That's probably why she's so grown-up, and wears such fancy clothes."

"Yes, and also very likely why she was so anxious to make an impression on you with a wonderful story that was new to you. You will always find people everywhere that try to do that, though they are never so important as they would like you to think. However, I think there was also another reason why she wanted to impress you, Evelyn."

"I wondered why she took so much trouble,"

said Evelyn. "Perhaps she wanted me to like her."

"I think that was the reason," said Mrs. Barry, smiling, "and I would be friendly with her, even if I didn't like her very much. You needn't be intimate, of course—just friendly."

"Well, I will be if I ought to," promised Evelyn dolefully.

"That is my own heroic daughter!" cried her mother, and Evelyn joined her in a hearty laugh at her own "heroism"!

CHAPTER VI

A MERRY CHRISTMAS EVE

“**C**OME home promptly after the singing, girls,” said Mrs. Barry, coming out of the living-room as Joyce and Evelyn came downstairs toward the front door, “and there will be a nice hot supper waiting for you.”

“I’m sorry we’re going to leave you all alone, mother,” said Evelyn, “but we’ll not be late. It’s too bad father’s in Washington and Dick’s at the basket-ball match and we two are going down to the tree, all in one evening.”

“Never mind, you won’t be late. Joyce, fasten up your coat, and be sure not to take cold. You look tired still, after that party yesterday. Good-by, dears. Enjoy yourselves.”

The girls kissed their mother good-by and ran down the stoop to take the car to the subway station where they were to meet Miss Langdon and some other teachers, who were taking the Clifton girls to sing Christmas carols that Christmas Eve around the great Com-

munity Tree in a downtown park. Every evening that holiday week, some of the city's young people were to entertain at the city's tree. The Clifton girls were invited to perform first, on Christmas Eve, because their school chorus was known as one of the best in the city, and on other evenings there were to be pageants, dancing, and music by various young folks' organizations.

It was a gala occasion, for which the girls had been practicing early and late ever since Thanksgiving. The stars were already twinkling in the sky as Evelyn and Joyce set out, though it was only five o'clock. Evelyn felt sorry Joyce seemed so tired and quiet, for the program was to begin at half-past five and last until six, and then there was the whole distance home to be traversed again. Evidently the previous day's party, which Joyce had attended with Virginia at the home of one of the younger girls in the neighborhood, had been unusually lively.

As Joyce evidently preferred her thoughts to conversation, Evelyn let her alone and talked with Aline and Priscilla all the way downtown, while Joyce sat on the other side of the train with Virginia.

"I hope somebody gives that child a new hat for Christmas," remarked Aline, critically observing her younger sister. "Ever since she

lost that one overboard—you remember the day we went on the excursion?—she will wear that frightful old tam-o'-shanter. Helena says it looks as if it came out of the Ark."

"Helena has so many clothes I suppose she thinks she can criticize everyone else's," said Priscilla. "I don't see anything the matter with that tam except that Jinny has put it on so that it sticks out too much in the back. She's only a kid—why not let her wear what she likes?"

"I'll tell her to flatten it down when we get out," said Aline. But she had no opportunity to do so, for a great crowd was swarming into the station, and the girls had to struggle up the steps to the street as best they could.

When they reached the little downtown park surrounded by skyscrapers, great crowds of workers from the offices nearby were pouring into the street, and making their way to the north side of the square, where the enormous city Christmas-tree, brought down from the Adirondacks, had been "planted." It was draped with long chains of colored electric bulbs, which glittered faintly in the light of the street lamps, and at the top a big white star crowned the tree.

"This way, girls," said Miss Langdon, indicating a grandstand for the entertainers that

had been lavishly decorated with pine-branches and long green garlands.

Up the steps the Clifton girls climbed, and took their places just behind a group of trumpeters that were to lead the singing. The clock on a tall tower nearby struck half-past five, and, at that signal, the first lights of the tree blazed out on the low branches that trailed the ground. The trumpets sounded, and the beautiful chorus of girlish voices broke into "This Tree was grown on Christmas Day!"

As they sang, the red, green, and yellow lights spread up the tree, and finally the star blazed out in full glory. It was a splendid sight, and all the girls felt a great thrill as they sang, caused both by the beauty of the scenes and by the feeling that their music contributed so much to that brilliant Christmas Eve in the big city.

The crowd was liberal with applause, and the girls sang one carol after another with increasing spirit until the clock struck six, and it was time to leave.

"Oh, I don't want to go!" said Evelyn. "This has been a perfectly gorgeous Christmas Eve. I never had such a good time."

"Yes, it's been much more Christmas-y than getting presents," agreed Priscilla. "But everybody's going, so we must. Anyway, it really is getting cold."

A sharp wind was beginning to rise, so the girls trudged briskly back to the subway in the rear of the Clifton procession. As Evelyn did not see Joyce at the uptown station where she alighted, she supposed her gone on ahead, and made haste to reach the warm, cosy house, where she quickly slipped off her things and ran downstairs to the dining-room. No one was there but her mother.

"Where's Joyce? Didn't she come home with you?" asked Mrs. Barry.

"No, she was with Virginia all the time. I suppose they came back with Aline and Helena. I was with Priscilla, and thought Joyce would get home first. She was ahead of us."

"Well, if she was with the others, she probably will be here right away," said Mrs. Barry. "Sit down, Evelyn, for you must be hungry."

Evelyn was very hungry, and the scalloped oysters smelled very good. She had eaten quite a quantity of them, and had told her mother all about the tree and the carols, and was beginning on some apple-sauce and hot gingerbread, when she noticed that her mother was paying small attention to her.

"I wonder where Joyce can be," said Mrs. Barry. "You've been in nearly half an hour, and it is much too dark and late for her to be out, even with the others."

Evelyn finished eating quickly, and then she

and her mother went to the sitting-room. Evelyn tried to read a book, and her mother glanced at the newspaper, but Evelyn could see that she glanced almost as often at the clock. Five minutes, ten minutes, went by, then a quarter of an hour. Then the clock struck eight.

"I am going to call up Mrs. Gaines," said Mrs. Barry, laying down the paper, "and ask her if——"

A loud ring at the doorbell interrupted here. Evelyn answered it, and in walked Aline.

"Is that kid sister of mine here, Evelyn?" she demanded cheerfully. "I thought I'd better look her up."

"Aline! Isn't Joyce with Virginia?" gasped Evelyn, and Mrs. Barry stepped into the hall with a very anxious face.

"No!" said Aline, looking frightened. "The last I saw of them was when they rushed ahead of Rose and Miss Langdon, who were in front as we came back after the singing, and called out that they would beat us all to the station."

"This is dreadful!" cried Mrs. Barry. "I think, Aline, I had better telephone your father at once."

"He and mother are out at dinner," said Aline blankly. "That's why I came over."

"Mother," said Evelyn, as the three stood gazing at one another in growing alarm, "shall I telephone to Rose, if she was the last person

who saw them, and see if she knows anything more?"

"Very well, it can do no harm. Be quick, dear."

Evelyn flew to the telephone on the table.

"Hello! Rose? This is Evelyn. Rose, something must be the matter. Joyce hasn't got home yet, and neither has Virginia. Aline is here. Did you see them after we left the tree? . . . Yes, that's what Aline says. . . . Oh, did you? . . . She did? . . . All right, I'll wait. . . . Hello! . . . But he's out of town, and Dick's not home. . . . Mr. Gaines is out at dinner. . . . Oh, will you? Thank you so much, Rose. Mother is dreadfully worried! Good-by.

"Rose says that when Virginia and Joyce passed her," explained Evelyn to the two anxious listeners, "Virginia was saying: 'Let's get some hot chocolate at Glassdoria.'"

"That's what that silly child will call those restaurants where you put a nickel in the slot to get food out of those glass cases in the wall!" cried Aline.

"Well, Miss Langdon told her not to, as we were to go right home. So she and Joyce went on into the crowd, and of course Rose thought they were with us in the subway. She told her father about it—that was why I stopped and

waited—and he is coming right over to see you, mother.”

“He is very kind,” said Mrs. Barry, somewhat relieved. “I really do not know what to do first.”

In less than five minutes Mr. Willing appeared, and with him came Rose. Nobody could have looked less absent-minded than the curator. He was as alert as though all his attention were required to mend the yard-arm of a ship-model!

“My daughter tells me, Mrs. Barry,” he began, “that Miss Virginia has a great fondness for these automatic restaurants. Don’t you think they may have decided to go and get some chocolate even after they were told not to?”

“Possibly,” answered Mrs. Barry, “but even if they did, they should be home by this time.”

“Perhaps they decided to stay for supper,” said Mr. Willing, with a slight smile which somehow was reassuring. “It’s Christmas Eve, you know, and they are probably much excited and like the independence of being downtown alone, and have forgotten all about such things as clocks.”

“I believe that’s what they may have done,” said Aline. “That crazy Jinny! She is simply a maniac about those restaurants. You’d think

she was five years old. She very seldom goes downtown, but when she does, she always makes mother take her to one of those places for luncheon, though mother hates them."

"I propose visiting Glassdoria before we do anything else," suggested Mr. Willing. "As I am the only gentleman available, I'll be glad to go down there, if you like, Mrs. Barry, and Rose will go with me to identify the two young ladies, whom I do not know."

"I'll go too," said Aline.

"I think Virginia will probably be glad to see you," said Mr. Willing, "and if Evelyn wants to come, we'd be glad to have her."

"Yes, go, Evelyn," said Mrs. Barry, "and bring Joyce back, since Mr. Willing seems sure you will find them. At any rate, it won't take long to find out. I only hope they haven't run away!"

"It's only half-past eight, so they can't have run far," said Mr. Willing. "Don't worry more than you can help, Mrs. Barry. I have known the best of girls to absent herself from home temporarily—when she was vexed at something!"

He and Rose smiled at each other.

"We'll telephone you in half an hour," he promised Mrs. Barry as the party left the house.

For the second time that evening, Evelyn

found herself bound for the little park downtown, this time with a heart as anxious as it had been light before. Christmas Eve seemed to have vanished with Joyce's disappearance. Where had she gone? And why had she been so downcast early in the evening? And what was the matter with Aline, who looked almost ready to cry in spite of Mr. Willing's encouraging words? Evelyn looked at him with real gratitude. What would they have done without him?

Poor Virginia's favorite restaurant was situated almost directly across the street from the great Christmas tree, which was still lighted, but to Evelyn's eyes had lost much of its brightness. Into the white-tiled, white-painted room, Mr. Willing cheerfully led his search-party. A few late Christmas shoppers were refreshing themselves here and there, but no Virginia nor Joyce appeared. The room turned a right angle in the back, and extended all the way to the side street. Through this angle the party slowly progressed, scanning the occupants of each table carefully.

"I see them!" cried Rose. "There they are at the end table!"

And there they were! Evelyn had thought they would be frightened, or defiant, or ashamed. But they were none of these, only

unfeignedly glad to see someone they knew, as Mr. Willing had predicted.

"Joyce, why didn't you come home?" said Evelyn reproachfully.

"Don't scold her, it's my fault," said Virginia, before Joyce could answer.

"Oh, we're not scolding anybody to-night, it's Christmas Eve," announced Mr. Willing cheerfully. "Rose, I see there's a telephone in the front there, so suppose you telephone Mrs. Barry that the lost are found. Then, before we go home, let's all have some ice-cream!"

Any stiffness that might have existed between the wanderers and the searchers was melted by this popular proposal, and in two or three minutes, the end table was surrounded by a very pleasant party.

"I do think you ought to tell us what you've been doing down here, Jinny," said Aline. "You frightened us nearly to death."

Virginia looked rather pleased, and laid down her spoon.

"All right, I'll tell you all about it," she said. "I decided to run away."

"And you, too, Joyce?" asked Evelyn.

"No, she told me, and I was trying to keep her from doing it," said Joyce.

"Listen!" said Virginia. "Do you remember the day we went on the excursion, and saw

the two little girls coming out of the movie studio?"

"Little girls!" cried Aline. "They were forty years old apiece! They were just fixed to look young."

"Well, I do look young," said Virginia, calmly, "so I don't have to get fixed. So I decided that to-morrow I would go over there and see if I could act in the movies."

"Where were you going to stay all night?"

"At Aunt Fanny's. She would let me."

"But, Virginia dear, to-morrow is Christmas," said Rose, "and the studio would be closed up."

Virginia's face fell.

"I never thought of that!" she admitted.

"Well, why did you want to run away?" demanded Aline. "I don't think it's a bit nice of you to think of such things, when you have a good home!"

Virginia's eyes, for the first time, began to look watery. She did not answer.

"I don't think she has such a good home!" blazed Joyce, suddenly, to the intense astonishment of everybody. "You and Helena bother her all the time! Helena said yesterday before the party that her hair looked like a rat-tail! That's why she wanted to run away!"

"Well, it doesn't look like one any more,

anyway!" cried Virginia, and snatched off the despised tam-o'-shanter. "There!"

"What on earth have you done to it?" gasped Aline.

"I took my Christmas money and went downtown this morning and had it permanently waved," explained Virginia, her self-confidence returning as she shook a wonderful array of ringlets and waves that supplied an explanation of why her tam-o'-shanter had bulged early in the evening. "Doesn't it look lovely? And it'll be just like this six months!"

Her pleasure was evidently so great that any criticism was silenced. There might have been a good deal, for the change from the pig-tail to the flowing curls was quite startling, and the curls were still almost hot.

Mr. Willing was the first to say anything.

"Those would be a great help in the movies," he said, "but don't you think the folks at home would like to see them too?"

"Yes. I want to show them to Helena," said Virginia.

The little party filed over to the station once more in a very happy frame of mind. Mr. Willing walked with Virginia and Aline, and told them entertaining stories. Joyce walked between Rose and Evelyn, and to the latter, as she passed the great Christmas-tree, it seemed

as if the lights and the star burned brighter than ever before.

"How nice your father is, Rose!" sighed Joyce. "I was so glad to see him! I didn't know what in the world to do with Jinny. She told me this morning that she was going to run off. So I stayed with her, even when she wanted to have supper downtown, hoping I could make her finally come home. I didn't want to let her go to her aunt's, and then run home and tell, and I couldn't bear to leave her alone. She had just got sick of putting nickels in the slot when your father came in!"

"Father always knows what to do in emergencies," said Rose, proudly. "Really, he does. Of course, he has had some experience with this sort of emergency. I ran away once, Joyce."

"You did?"

"Yes, just about as far as Virginia did! I got mad because mother wouldn't buy me a terrible green dress that I fell in love with. Father came after me, and found me, and brought me back. We often laugh about it, now!"

"It's funny when it's all over," said Evelyn, "but I thought, coming down, that I should never laugh again. Whatever would we have done without your father, Rose?"

"He'll be as happy as you are that every-

thing is all right again," declared Rose. "We'll have a merry Christmas, after all our scare!"

Indeed, it seemed as if they all would, for as the girls said good-night, they heard Aline behind them saying to Virginia:

"Your hair looks—er—perfectly wonderful, Jinny! And you mustn't worry about what Helena says, any more. I heard her yesterday, but I never thought it would vex you so. I won't let her do it again!"

CHAPTER VII

EVELYN'S PLAY

"THIS," announced Priscilla, "is the time we get a treat."

It was half-past three on a cold Monday afternoon in early February. The Linger-Not Club was meeting at Priscilla's, and with them was Miss Langdon, who had been invited especially to hear Evelyn's play, which, after many struggles on the part of the writer, and much advice, good and otherwise, from the other girls, had been declared ready for a first discussion.

"I don't know about the treat," said Evelyn doubtfully. "It's been a lot of hard work, though everybody seems to think it just flows right out of my pen."

"Out of the Old Oaken Desk," corrected Dorothy. "Go ahead and tell us all about it, Evelyn. We won't interrupt."

"But you must!" said Evelyn earnestly. "If there's anything you don't like, then we

can fix it right away before we start rehearsing."

"All right, then we'll oblige by interrupting. I'd like to interrupt before we begin——"

"Anyone could tell Dorothy had an Irish grandfather," observed Aline.

"—and say that I trust the distinguished author has made up good parts suitable for each of our members."

"How could she? You know we're going to vote on assigning the parts, Dorothy. We thought that was much the fairest thing to do," said Priscilla, with just a trace of presidential worry in her voice.

"I'll tell you what I did about that," said Evelyn. "I wrote just nine parts, and they're all *very* good! It was hard to write a play where all the parts are awfully good, but I thought that was the kind we ought to have."

"You're a genius," declared Dorothy. "Pray proceed, Evelyn. You interest us greatly. What is the title of the drama?"

"It's called *An American Heroine*, and this is the list of characters," replied Evelyn, referring to a sheet of paper in her hand.

ESTHER JAFFREY

MRS. GRINNELL, her aunt

FRANCES HATFIELD

MARY OGDEN

} friends of Esther's

AUNT DINAH, an old colored servant

MISS BOWNE } neighbors
MRS. RUSSELL }

WILLIAM JAFFREY, Esther's brother

LIEUTENANT PAGET, U. S. N.

"Who is Lieutenant Paget?" demanded Dorothy.

"Wait, and you'll see," advised Evelyn.
"The first act takes place in the living-room of the Jaffrey house in 1814."

"How many acts are there?" asked Aline.

"Four."

"Are they all at the house?" inquired Rose.

"No, one is in the middle of Hell Gate."

"Goodness, how exciting!" cried Muriel, roused to speech. "Hurry up and go on, Evelyn!"

"Well, Esther is discovered, when the curtain rises, entertaining her two friends, and working——"

"On the sampler!" cried Virginia.

"No, Jinny, *not* on the sampler. Esther is An American Heroine, and she's working on bandages for the wounded sailors in the fleet. The girls talk about the war, and how brave the American sailors are, and how everybody will fight till the last man is killed if they have to in order to win."

"But how could they, if everybody—oh, well,

never mind! Go ahead. Only, you ought to call it *Three American Heroines*," said Helena, beginning a rather just criticism, but showing herself more careful of Evelyn's feelings than she usually was with most people.

"Then Esther's aunt comes in—that's Mrs. Grinnell—and says such a sacrifice will be unnecessary, because the United States will soon sue for peace. Then she sits down and cries because the war is so wicked, and the girls go right on making bandages."

The listeners nodded strong approval.

"Aunt Dinah comes in next, announcing two ladies calling on Mrs. Grinnell. While they are coming in, Aunt Dinah gets Esther to one side and says that an American naval officer is lying senseless on the front lawn."

"Goodness! How did he get there?" inquired Muriel.

"He was swept off his ship, which was passing up the river, by the overhanging branches of a tree."

"Oh, just the way it really happened!" cried the girls, much pleased.

"Esther orders him brought into the house, but before she can tell her aunt, she hears Miss Bowne say that a large fleet of enemy ships has been seen in the Sound, and Mrs. Russell says that perhaps then the war will really be over sometime. And Mrs. Grinnell says that

she thinks it's so foolish to fight, especially since one can't buy any clothes that are fit to be seen any more, on account of the blockade, that she would do all she could to bring the war to an end. So Esther decides she will say nothing, and just take care of the officer herself. She slips off to see to him, and doesn't come back until after the old ladies have gone, and then she tells the girls about the officer, who is still unconscious, and says that for the sake of safety, she has put him——"

"Where?" whispered a breathless chorus, as Evelyn paused.

"Into the secret chamber!"

"In the Jaffrey House? Evelyn *dear!*" protested Rose. "You know there's hardly as much as a shelf on the wall in that house!"

"Well, there ought to be a secret chamber," said Evelyn obstinately.

"Let's leave the situation of the room to the imagination," suggested Miss Langdon, who had been an interested listener as the plot unfolded. "You don't have to have everything explained, Rose. The audience won't know as much about the house as you do."

"All right," said Rose submissively. "What happens then?"

"The girls go off to get ready for a ball at Mrs. Russell's, leaving Aunt Dinah to watch the officer. That's all the first act."

“In the second act, it’s midnight, and the girls are sitting around one candle after their return from the ball. They have learned from their partners at the ball that this officer’s ship, the *Valor*, is one of a fleet putting out to engage the enemy, and that this fleet is now lying just across the river, waiting for a wind, and that the enemy fleet has been informed of its approach. They say that Mrs. Russell kept saying all evening that the British admiral, who is a friend of hers, has sent her word that he would dine with her some day the next week!

“Just at this moment, Aunt Dinah brings in the officer, who has come to. The girls tell him everything that has happened, and he says he must rejoin his ship at once, and have the sailing-orders changed, or the enemy will not be surprised by the American fleet. The question is, how to get across the river.”

“In the middle of the night, too!” gasped Muriel.

“Oh, it’s moonlight. He asks Esther if she has a rowboat, and she has, but she tells him he couldn’t possibly shoot the rapids, and neither can she, alone. But she has a brother who is only fifteen, but he knows where all the rocks are in the channel, and she thinks that the two of them will be strong enough to row the officer over. Of course he makes a fuss, but she wakes up the brother, and he is crazy to

do it, so they all three go off to the boat. They are to send up a rocket when they reach the ship. The girls wait at the window in great anguish, until finally they see the rocket go off. That's all the second act."

"And does Esther get back?" demanded Joyce.

"Yes, the third act is the next morning, and she tells all about their adventures. Then the girls look across the river to the place where the *Valor* was, and they see only a merchant ship. But Esther says that the *Valor* has been ordered to disguise herself that way, and so have the other ships of the fleet, so they can sail without being suspected by the enemy.

"Then I do want to have just a short scene, showing how the *Valor* was disguised, and I thought Miss Langdon could help us do that, she knows how to do so many things. Couldn't you, Miss Langdon?" said Evelyn appealingly.

"I'll try!" said the young teacher promptly. "I can't promise to succeed, for I've never had much experience in disguising ships! But that scene would add a lot to the play, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes!" agreed the club. "What happens then, Evelyn?"

"The last act, which is after the war. Lieutenant Paget has fallen in love with Esther, and comes back to see her. And he tells her aunt and the other ladies the story of her hero-

ism, and how it helped win a great victory. And they are ashamed, especially Mrs. Russell, who has lost all her money in the war! And everyone else is happy, and it is all due to the American heroine."

Evelyn stopped, out of breath.

"It's perfectly splendid!" said everybody. "How bright you are to think of all that, Evelyn! Isn't she, Miss Langdon?"

"Yes, it's a very pleasant mixture of fiction and fact," smiled Miss Langdon. "The bold admiral who invited himself to dinner, though he never came, was a real person—and it was the famous ship *Essex* that disguised herself in the War of 1812, off South America, wasn't it? The rest of your story, Evelyn, is very entertaining, and if you make Esther do anything she didn't, no one can correct you."

"Isn't anything known about that family of Jaffreys?" asked Priscilla.

"Very little, my father says," answered Rose. "They always lived very quietly, though they were wealthy and respected. I guess Evelyn's play is much more exciting than anything they ever did."

"And it's all written out, isn't it, Evelyn?" asked Priscilla.

"Yes, it's over there on the table. I brought it so you girls could take it and copy your parts."

"Then we ought to vote on the parts. Well, there's only one person who ought to be *Aunt Dinah*, and that's Virginia. She's so crazy to black up!"

"Yes, do please let me be her," begged Virginia.

There was no competition for this part, and all the girls were so glad that Virginia had what she wanted that no one thought of making the obvious remark that her hair, at least in its present state, qualified her well for *Aunt Dinah's* rôle.

Priscilla, who was universally popular, was favored with the part of *Esther*, rather to her confusion, and Dorothy was immediately nominated for the rôle of *William*, greatly to her satisfaction, for she had wanted the part all the time. The girls were equally determined that Rose should be *Lieutenant Paget*, because she was tall and what Muriel called "romantic-looking." Evelyn could see that Helena, in spite of her attractions and ability, was not going to fare well in the contest, and she also saw that Helena realized the fact, and was rather affronted.

"It's nothing but her own fault," thought Evelyn; "if she'd behave better, she'd get as well treated as anyone."

Then she remembered that she was to be a

friend to Helena, and the next minute heard someone saying:

"Helena, you can be the aunt, *Mrs. Grinnell*. She has a long part."

"I won't!" cried Helena sharply. "I think it's a mean part! I wouldn't be so unpatriotic for anything!"

"It's only make-believe, you know," remarked Miss Langdon, soothingly. "It's just to bring out the contrast in characters. No one thinks you're unpatriotic, Helena."

"I don't care, I don't want the part."

"Give it to me," said Evelyn. "I don't mind. I wrote it just to show how mean some people always are. It doesn't make me mean, and I don't want a good part if I wrote the play."

"I don't see why not," said Aline. "I think you ought to be *Frances*."

"I won't be *Frances*!" said Evelyn. "Helena can do it much better than I can, and I nominate her for it."

The girls saw that her mind was made up, and perhaps they also saw that Helena would be excellent as one of the leading girl characters, much better than in the quaint part of the unpatriotic elderly aunt, which Evelyn, with her power of imagination, could probably play very well. Helena, therefore, was chosen as *Frances*, Evelyn as *Mrs. Grinnell*, and Aline

as *Mary*. Joyce and Muriel, following Evelyn's example, declared themselves perfectly satisfied to be *Miss Bowne* and *Mrs. Russell*, and announced that their acting was going to be perfectly wonderful.

"Now for the costumes," said Helena, her good humor quite restored. "Of course, we all wear short-waisted frocks, in light colors, with our hair done high in a cluster of ringlets. Isn't that the way the girls dressed in those days, Miss Langdon?"

"Yes. What shall you do about getting your costumes? Each one make her own? You can copy the old styles in inexpensive materials, you know."

"Yes, I think it would be lots of fun to do that," said Helena, and it seemed to be the general opinion.

"I have an idea," said Rose. "Father is just beginning to unpack those trunks in the garret, and there are some gorgeous dresses there that we could copy, if he would let us. I'll ask him."

"And for the two young gentlemen," continued Miss Langdon,—“I see they are looking anxious!—I think we could hire suitable raiment from a costumer. That wouldn't be very expensive. And now, for that ship. Evelyn, I've been thinking hard, but I don't see where you'll get a crew from your company. You'll

have to send out an S O S. Haven't you girls any brothers that like to act?"

"Not with girls!" replied all the sisters of brothers, promptly and in unison.

"But Evelyn's plan makes the scene entirely separate from the rest of the play. The boys could be by themselves, and all together."

"They might like that," admitted Priscilla. "Let's see how many of them there are that are old enough and not too old. There are my two brothers, and there's Paul—he's Dorothy's twin—Aline, would Tom take part?"

"He would if Paul did."

"My kid brother Gordon would probably like to be in it," volunteered Helena. "He's only eleven, but he could be cabin-boy."

"That's only five—it's not enough."

"I'll ask my cousins, the Sutherland boys," offered Muriel.

"Are those Sutherland boys your cousins?" cried Miss Langdon. "Why, if we could get them, the scene is as good as made!"

Her enthusiasm was shared by everyone, and Muriel, the silent, the retiring, basked in the glow of public applause. The three Sutherland boys, who lived in the large house on the southern corner of the parkway, were famous local characters. They were respectively thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen. Whatever boys could do, or know, or make, was familiar to them.

When they tired of raising rabbits in the back yard, and wireless towers on the roof, they would retire to the fastnesses of the top floor, which belonged to them, and invent hydraulic engines, and traps to catch tigers. They had a "laboratory" from which frightful noises and smells were wont to issue and alarm the neighbors. Their accomplishments made them highly respected by the other boys of the neighborhood, and though the three apparently preferred one another's society, in general, to that of most other persons, they were considered a great addition to any gathering. If any boys could rig, disguise, man, and sail a ship, it would be the Sutherlands.

"Do get them, Muriel," said Rose, "and if you do, I think we ought to have a good place to give the play in, just to show it off properly. I shall ask father if he won't find out from the Society if we can't use the assembly room. It's meant for the use of the neighborhood, and I don't see why we couldn't have it."

"Then if we can, let's sell tickets, and give the money to the Society to buy things for their collection!" cried Dorothy. "I think that would be a splendid idea, even if I did think of it myself!"

"Girls, girls!" cried Miss Langdon, trying to stem the storm of applause roused by this

brilliant financial plan, "stop just a minute! How far are you going? I thought this was just to be a little entertainment for your friends."

"It was, but why can't we do something bigger?" said Priscilla. "Don't you think we're able to, Miss Langdon?"

"You really took my breath away for a moment," confessed Miss Langdon. "Of course, if all your plans turn out just the way you want them to—if the Society will lend you the room, and the boys will help, and you are all willing to work *very* hard rehearsing—you might succeed. But I don't want you to think that it will be easy. It is a very big undertaking that you have planned since we sat down here an hour ago."

"That's why we like it—because it's big," said Helena.

"Oh, we'll all work, Miss Langdon," promised Priscilla. "And it's so much nicer to get other people to help and give something really good, if we can, and do something for the neighborhood and our friends, than to give a foolish little show just for ourselves."

"That's perfectly true," agreed her teacher, "and of course, I'll help you all I can. This is the way that good ideas always grow when people are willing to work together, and very

often they do succeed. How soon do you wish to give the play?"

"We thought of doing it early in the spring," said Priscilla.

"Then we ought to set about rehearsing at once."

"All right, let's spend the rest of the time copying our parts," and in a few minutes nothing was heard in the room where the nine were assembled except the scratching of pencils.

CHAPTER VIII

LOTS OF TROUBLE

“**A**RE you going home now?” asked Rose, meeting Evelyn in the school hall one day not long after the events recorded in the last chapter.

“Yes, right away.”

“Then I’ll walk over with you.”

As soon as the girls had left the building, Rose said:

“Father has just heard from the secretary of the Society, and they are quite willing for us to use the assembly room for our play. But we must let them know the date we want it for, so they won’t give it to anyone else. I’m going to stop at Priscilla’s to tell her.”

“Isn’t that fine!” said Evelyn. “Have you heard whether the boys will take part or not?”

“No, perhaps Priscilla has. I dare say they will, if we can have the big room. The Society has given us a start, anyhow. That’s something to be thankful for,” said Rose, with a sigh.

"Why, what's the matter, Rose?" asked Evelyn. Rose unquestionably looked very blue. "Has something happened?"

"Yes, something has. I am so mad I don't know what to do. You know my father has been planning a book on *Famous American Fighting-ships* for a long time?"

"Yes, you said something about it."

"Well, he had been corresponding with a publisher about it, and the publisher—Marsden & Company—had almost agreed to take it. They had approved all his plans, and he was going to start working on it right away. This morning he received a letter from them saying that they could not take the book after all."

"What a pity! Your father must be terribly disappointed."

"He is. And I believe it's all the fault of that dreadful Helena Hawthorne."

"Helena? Why, how could she have anything to do with it?"

"She's Mr. Marsden's niece. The Marsden girls are those cousins of hers she's always visiting."

"But I don't see"——

"I think she told them about that accident that happened to the old documents about guns, which father was using at the time of the fire in the State Library. I thought everybody knew that long ago. Had you heard of it?"

“Why, yes, it’s not a secret, is it?”

“Oh, no. It happened nearly ten years ago, and it was in the papers, because the Library offered a reward to anyone who could return the documents, and wrote father a letter exonerating him from any blame in connection with the fire, which they found had been caused by defective wiring.”

Here was news to Evelyn! Helena, if she knew about the letter, had not revealed it. Evelyn said nothing, and Rose continued:

“You see, Helena is always trying to live up to those Marsden girls, who are three or four years older than she is, and have a dozen times as much money. Of course she knew, as many people did, that father was planning this book on ships, and she also knew her uncle’s firm was interested in it. It’s my opinion that she heard the story about the fire lately, thought it was new, because she didn’t remember when the accident happened ten years ago, and succeeded in impressing her cousins with something they didn’t know, either. Haven’t you noticed how pleased she’s been with herself lately?”

“Even more than usual!” sighed Evelyn, with a little laugh. “And do you think the girls told their father?”

“Yes.”

“But if your father was exonerated by the

Library, I shouldn't think he would have any more trouble over the accident."

"Evelyn, you have no idea how hard the least trouble with a person's reputation is to live down!" cried Rose, the tears almost in her eyes. "I know my father had nothing more to do with the disappearance of those papers than I did, and he has ever so many friends who have perfect confidence in him, but one or two people who aren't convinced can make more trouble than a dozen loyal friends can do away with. This isn't the first time he's had to give up writing certain articles that involved the inspection of valuable documents, but it is the first time that it will make a serious difference to us."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"The money from the book was intended to help pay my college expenses in two years, when I hope to go, and now I don't know if I can go at all!"

"Oh, Rose, how dreadful! But are you sure it will never be published?"

"I'm sure Marsden & Company's saying they can't take it is just a polite way of saying they won't give the work to my father. They have evidently been influenced against him."

"Why, how could a mere child like Helena influence a big publishing company!" exclaimed

Evelyn incredulously. "What could she say that would change their minds!"

"It's not what she says of her own self," replied Rose, "but how she calls their attention to the bad side of other people's talk. They have heard of only half of what has been said, and I've heard father say that a half truth is often worse than a lie."

"You don't think Helena did it on purpose?" cried Evelyn, greatly shocked.

"Of course I want to be fair," answered Rose, trying to speak quietly, "and the only reason I think it was her doing is that she spent the last week-end at her cousins. Last Friday Marsden & Company wrote father and made an appointment this week to discuss the book with him, and to-day, which is Tuesday, this second letter arrived putting an absolute end to the whole proposal. Of course they may only want to investigate the facts about the State Library accident, but it makes a very unpleasant situation."

"I'm sure that must be what they want to do," said Evelyn, trying to offer some comfort. "How could Helena's silly talk upset the whole plan?"

"Anybody that drags up an old story and passes it around can upset—well, I was going to say the earth!" said Rose, with an experience in advance of her fifteen years.

"But I don't see why she should want to do it!" cried Evelyn, in real perplexity.

"Oh, I don't really think she had any idea how much harm she could do by gossiping," admitted Rose magnanimously. "Of course, I think she dislikes me because I always am ahead of her in school, and it did look as if I was going to have what I wanted and going to college. You're not in her class, of course, Evelyn, and perhaps you may not have noticed that Helena isn't good at lessons at all. She's wonderfully musical, and gifted but so far her mother can't afford to have her educated properly in music, so you see she really hasn't anything she wants, and I think it makes her spiteful. Well, there's nothing to do but wait and see how things turn out. Here we are at Priscilla's."

Priscilla had already reached home, and was delighted to hear Rose's news about the assembly room. She also had some information to impart in return.

"The boys will take part!" she announced. "You know, Muriel is an awfully smart child, and it's all due to her that we got them to come into the play. She went and told her cousins that we wanted a ship made, only she didn't think they knew anything about those old ships because they were so much interested in tiger-traps and so forth, and of course they immedi-

ately said they could easily make any kind of ship that ever sailed! Only they thought it was queer for girls to want a ship. So she asked them to be in the scene, and they said they would. And then all the other boys said that if the Sutherlands would, they would!"

"So that's settled," said Evelyn. "I had no idea Muriel was so clever."

"You never can tell about these awfully quiet people," replied Priscilla, with an air of experience. "And Miss Langdon says that some day soon she'll go downtown with one or two of us and shop for material for our dresses."

"That reminds me," said Rose, "that I asked father about the dresses that he and the assistant curators are unpacking, and he said we might come up to the garret and *look* if we would promise not to touch. Of course I promised for everybody! Do you girls want to come over this afternoon, and see what there is, so as to have ideas in case we go shopping unexpectedly?"

Neither Evelyn nor Priscilla had much studying to do for the next day, so they both accepted the invitation with alacrity, and made their way quickly over to the Jaffrey House. They left their things in Rose's room, and she then led them up a small staircase at the other end of the Willings' private hall, to the low-ceilinged attic, where they found Mr. Willing

and one of his assistants cataloguing and examining the contents of several trunks, the first that had been opened of a quantity that nearly filled the attic.

“Aren’t they sweet!” cried Priscilla, looking lovingly at (but not touching) some quaint old frocks, of rose-color and lavender, that were laid at full length on a large piece of white canvas stretched on the floor. “Mr. Willing, are these going to be put on exhibition downstairs?”

“Yes, very soon, and you can come and see them again if you want to copy the style,” answered Mr. Willing, “but Rose thought you would like to see the colors right away before you bought the materials for your costumes.”

The rays of the western sun, falling through the single window of the garret, brought out the old-fashioned shades of the gowns to perfection, and made the girls despair of ever matching them in modern material. They decided, however, that a certain shade of blue was just the one to try to find for *Esther*, and that *Mary* and *Frances* ought respectively to wear a pink flowered muslin and a green-dotted mull. For her own part of *Mrs. Grinnell*, Evelyn decided firmly on a garnet shade which appeared in a gown that had evidently belonged to a very large lady of long ago. The girls remonstrated in vain, and suggested lav-

ender as likely to be more becoming. Evelyn was adamant, and said that she wished to look exactly like a foolish old lady, if that was what she was meant to be!

"I guess you're right, perhaps, Evelyn," said Rose finally, "though that garnet is a terrible color. If you will wear it, I think you ought to have a cap, to make up for it, though."

"Here's a cap that came with that costume," said Mr. Willing, holding up a majestic confection of lace, with black velvet strings and a large frill. "If you young ladies have finished here, you can take this downstairs with you to examine it, but Rose must bring it up again in a few minutes. I'm sorry to disturb you, but we need the room to put down another canvas, for we're going to open another trunk."

"Oh, we have quite finished, Mr. Willing," said Priscilla, "it's awfully kind of you to let us get a first view this way, and we've got lots of ideas! Of course you need the room. I had no idea the attic was so small."

"It's the way the roof slopes," said Rose. "It looks big outside, but not when you get in. Come on, let's go and take a pattern of this wonderful cap for Evelyn."

Evelyn tried on the cap before Rose's mirror, and was not displeased to find that it was very becoming, while it added to her height and be-

stowed on her a dignity very essential to a lady of *Mrs. Grinnell's* strong principles.

She borrowed pencil and paper from Rose, and took a seat in the corner beside the jutting brick fireplace, and began to measure and sketch the cap. Priscilla and Rose discussed the color-scheme for the other girls' costumes, and various problems which had come up in connection with the play, notably the most tactful method of prevailing on Virginia to refrain from tying gilt curtain-rings on her ears, a touch which she insisted would lend perfect realism to the part of *Aunt Dinah*.

Evelyn finished her sketch, and waited for a good opportunity to interrupt the earnest conversation and give back the cap, for which she knew Mr. Willing was waiting. It was the first time she had been in Rose's room since the occasion of her invitation to see the museum, and as she now examined it leisurely, it confirmed her first impression, that it was a room any girl would fancy. Its odd shape, quaint fireplace, large deep windows, even the shabby mahogany wainscoting, which in places, as near the fireplace beside her, was scratched and marred, added charm to the little chamber in the old guest-wing, and made Evelyn glad that Rose had at least such a place of refuge from the numerous difficulties that beset her.

At last she felt she had to interrupt even

so important a point of discussion as what the price of tickets should be—some members of the club rated their value as actors too high, others thought!—and she said to Rose:

“If you’re busy, I’ll just take this cap back to your father, and then I must go home.”

“All right, Evelyn dear, if you don’t mind,” replied Rose. “As I was saying, Priscilla, I don’t think anybody in the show is worth a dollar. Let’s propose twenty-five cents.”

Evelyn sped down the hall and upstairs with the cap. Mr. Willing was deep in a trunk, but he greeted her with a kind smile and thanked her for her promptness in returning the millinery.

“Let me know if there’s anything else I can do for you,” he said. “I hear you’ve written a fine play.”

“It’s not very good,” said Evelyn, modestly, “but I’m glad that Rose has one of the best parts.”

Mr. Willing looked proud for a moment, and then sighed.

“I’m glad too,” he said, “for I want her to have all the fun she can.”

Evelyn pondered on his words as she went downstairs, and again after she had said good-bye to Rose and was on her way home across the park. She knew why he had sighed, she thought. It was because his late disappoint-

ment over the book made him feel that he could not do for Rose all he would wish to, and it was very hard for him to bear.

And what a good friend Mr. Willing had been to her family, finding Joyce so promptly that dreadful Christmas Eve less than three months ago, and how kind he was about the play! He was as friendly in his way as Rose had been in hers, and Evelyn really treasured Rose's friendship because she saw that it was founded on a confidence in her own worth which she sincerely hoped she merited. If she could only do something to help Rose and her father, she felt it would give her great happiness. But, as Rose had said, the only thing to do seemed to be to wait awhile and see how things turned out.

Then there was Helena, the cause, or the apparent cause, of nearly all the trouble that Evelyn had experienced since she had joined the Linger-Nots. She had managed to get her a good part in the play, for which she knew Helena to be personally grateful to her, but far from making Helena behave better, it seemed to have had no influence on her conduct toward other members of the club. It was true that Helena was working hard on her part, and doing everything she could to make the play a success. But that was all. Nearly all the girls were down on her, and if they ever learned the

story connected with Mr. Willing's book, they would, Evelyn felt, have nothing more to do with Helena. Then she would need a friend worse than ever. Oh, dear!

"Sometimes it's nice to be a friend, and sometimes it's not," thought Evelyn, as she went up her own stoop, "but it's always dreadfully responsible!"

CHAPTER IX

“AN AMERICAN HEROINE”

“**R**OSE! Are you ready? Because if you are, Miss Langdon says you’re to come right off, please,” cried Joyce, knocking loudly on Rose’s door.

“Yes, I am. Oh, dear, the audience isn’t there, is it?” gasped Rose, opening the door, and appearing in the full glory of cocked hat, gold lace, polished boots, and draped in a fine blue cape, which the costumer had assured her were the correct apparel of early American naval officers.

“Of course. I should hope so!” said the sensible Joyce, adjusting her flower-trimmed poke bonnet and patting her black mitts. “That’s what we sold the tickets for, isn’t it! Rose, you do look perfectly gorgeous, and so does Dorothy!”

“I do rather like this coat, only I should have thought it belonged to the Puritans, really,” answered Dorothy, examining her long brown coat with its flapping pockets and many nickel buttons. “I wanted boots too, but Miss

Langdon said I must wear low shoes, so I made silver buckles for them."

"You look something like *Pilgrim's Progress*, and I didn't know sailors wore boots," said Joyce, critically. "However, I guess it's best to wear what's becoming. Now do come on. Don't be scared, Rose, you can't put it off any longer, and it certainly ought to be good after the way we have rehearsed."

The girls scurried to the lecture-room of the museum, and entered by the back door. Here, behind the scenes, they found all the disorder and industry and excitement attendant on a play just before the curtain goes up. The six other Linger-Nots were grouped around Miss Langdon in attitudes of despair, nervousness, and pleasure, every one of them noticeably careful not to muss her frock. Priscilla, in her blue gown with a gold band around the foot, and her fair hair piled high beneath a tall comb, made a charming *Esther*, and Aline in the pink-flowered muslin and Helena in the green-dotted mull looked almost equally attractive. Evelyn, in her garnet frock and immense cap, lent a comic air to the scene, which was reflected in the elegant purple and crimson calling-costumes which Joyce and Muriel had respectively donned. Muriel had added a parasol, a fan, and a scent-bottle, all of which she manipulated with great effect. Virginia was at last

blackened up, thoroughly, and wore a yellow frock, white apron, and red kerchief on her hair.

From the rear of the stage came a deafening noise of hammering, as the three Sutherland boys, assisted by the five minor members of the crew of the *Valor*, put a few final touches on that gallant vessel. Dick Barry, who had consented to act as stage manager, snapped the footlights on and off, and made sure that the curtain would work. Through the curtain came a steady buzz of conversation that confirmed Joyce's statement that the audience had arrived, as well as merry bursts of music from the piano, which Miss Phillips had offered to play during intervals.

"The boys look splendid!" remarked Joyce, taking a peep at the busy crew. "I do think their coats are wonderful."

"You quite cheer me up, Joyce," said Miss Langdon. "Whenever I think of making eight blue muslin coats with gilt braid, I feel faint! I shall never do it again, I'm sure."

"Did you make their hats, too?"

"Hats? Have they hats?" cried Miss Langdon, springing up in surprise. "I made only one for Roger Sutherland, who is supposed to be captain."

"They all have them," said Joyce, "cocked hats with gilt cockades."

"Then it's a crew of officers," said Miss Langdon resignedly, sitting down again. "They all wanted them, and I suppose those three Sutherland boys made them out of newspaper and covered them with that blue muslin. A cocked hat for a cabin-boy! Well, never mind. They're happy, and their ship is wonderful."

"Miss Langdon," announced Dick, stepping down off the rear of the stage, "it's eight o'clock and all the audience seems to be here."

"Very well, then let us begin," answered Miss Langdon. "Now, girls, don't get excited. You all look very nice, and you know your parts perfectly. Boys! You've got to keep quiet now, we're going to begin. Come over here where you can look on. Never mind the ship now, Roger, it's all right. No, Rose, your hair is not coming down, I pinned it tightly. Dick, raise the curtain—now, we'll *have* to begin!"

The picture on which the curtain rose, of *Esther* and her two friends, working on white strips of muslin before an American flag that was draped in the background, was so attractive that the audience began to applaud before the first speech could be uttered, and the whole company on and behind the stage, including Miss Langdon, gave a sigh of relief. Perhaps the play would be good, after all!

Then the pacifistic *Mrs. Grinnell* came on,

and Evelyn brought the first laugh of the evening with her crocodile tears. She was rather eclipsed, however, by her two callers, and particularly so by Muriel, who had developed striking dramatic talents. She sniffed at her scent-bottle with such a tragic air as she remarked: "I never could let my dear husband go to the war!" that the audience, composed of neighbors who had known Muriel all her life as the most modest of all violets, shrieked with laughter and burst into applause.

Virginia was not recognized for a long time, much to her gratification. Although she had the smallest part, she entered into it with vigor, and made *Aunt Dinah* amazingly important and picturesque.

If the first act won the friendship of the audience, the second won their enthusiasm. Rose looked strikingly handsome in the candle-light, and no one thought of criticizing her boots. Dorothy was equally applauded, and when *Lieutenant Paget* suggested the possibility of the rowboat going aground on the rocks in Hell Gate, *William* cried: "Never! In our country's cause we cannot fail!" with a fervor that won a curtain-call.

The third act contained the big surprise of the play and brought out the boys in all their glory. The accomplished Sutherlands had made a cardboard ship about two-thirds the

length of the stage, which they propped up on the floor with wooden stays. It was painted dark brown, and equipped with two masts, a full set of sails, and a line of cannon peeping out of the portholes. When the curtain rose on this gallant ship, she was fully manned with a very valiant-looking crew, resplendent in gold lace and cocked hats to the last man, and before a word could be recited, she won a round of applause. The few lines of the scene chiefly fell to Roger Sutherland, the captain, for the boys had said: “Let the girls do the talking!” Roger, however, was quite equal to learning his commands for the crew, and gave them with vim. Under his directions, the crew put up a false mast, altered the sails on the original masts, and unrolled a strip of brown muslin, which they tacked over the line of guns, and lo! a peaceful merchantman appeared in the place of the *Valor*. During these operations two cocked hats fell overboard and remained motionless on the waves, but Roger entirely distracted attention from this mishap by shouting, with much presence of mind: “ ’Tis done! Ere sunset we shall meet the enemy, and they will be ours!”

“That was simply magnificent!” said Evelyn, behind the scenes, as the boys, much gratified by their reception, dragged the boat off the stage and reset the sea with a table and

chairs. "It was so good that I'm sure the last act, where nothing much happens, is going to be flat!"

But it was not, for each girl was keyed up to do her best, and the audience seemed keenly anxious not only to learn of the happiness of *Esther* and *Lieutenant Paget*, but to be satisfied by the undoing of the three disloyal ladies as well.

The whole cast was loudly applauded, and Evelyn received a special round as the author. The curtain was just going down for the last time, when Priscilla's father, who had been a proud spectator of his daughter's heroic deeds, called out:

"All of you stay where you are, and tell the boys to come on again! I've brought my camera, and I'll take a flashlight of the whole cast."

The boys were quite willing on this occasion to pose with the rest of the company, and the blue coats and cocked hats made a splendid background for the girls' dainty old-fashioned costumes, as they sat grouped in a semicircle, Rose standing at one end and Dorothy at the other. Mr. Cleveland's thoughtfulness put the touch on the whole evening, and was highly appreciated.

"Well, that show was worth a whole quarter!" declared Roger, struggling out of his gold-laced coat. "We had a swell time."

"I think you all did remarkably well," said Miss Langdon. "This is a real triumph for the Linger-Nots!"

"We made thirty-five dollars," said Dorothy, who had just been counting the receipts with Priscilla. "Now let's go out and see the audience."

Congratulations were showered on the cast as they mingled with the departing spectators, and one of the most appreciative members of the audience was an elderly lady who was a member of the Old Landmark Society, and had come to see this first performance given in the lecture-room by a neighborhood organization.

"I had no idea the young folks in the neighborhood were so ingenious," she said to Rose, who was standing nearby with Evelyn. "You must have made up this whole play about *Esther* out of your heads."

"Evelyn did," answered Rose. "Yes, there's nothing left in *Esther's* house about her except her sampler."

"I remember that," said the lady. "I do wish it was daytime, so I could show that curious piece of work to my friend here"—she indicated another lady who was standing beside her—who lives in Charleston, and is going home to-morrow."

"I should love to see it," said the Charles-

ton lady. "I must try to come here again next time I'm in New York."

"Perhaps father would let me take you into the room where it is," suggested Rose, "if you've come so far. 'I'll ask him!'"

She darted away, and in a moment returned with the key of the room.

"That's very kind," said the Old Landmark Society member. "I wish to show you the sampler," she added to her friend, "because it's really quite unusual. The girl who made it was an artist, even if nothing more is known about her."

Rose unlocked the door and turned on the light, and the four ladies, old and young, gathered around the bit of color on the wall.

"How very original!" said the lady from Charleston. "I'm so glad I could see it! I never saw anything like it before, and you know I own quite a collection of samplers myself."

"Yes, you're an expert in samplers," replied her friend. "Don't you think the house is natural, with the tree beside it? She's even made the smoke coming out of the chimney!"

"Yes, and the blending of the colors in the flowers she has chosen is particularly artistic. She made that band of buttercups across the middle just the right shade to go with the paler yellow of the house. Well, that sampler evidently meant a great deal to its maker, and

she made it so picturesque that it's no wonder it has survived all these years.”

“She must have been a very clever girl, and deserved, I dare say, to have a play written about her,” said the Society member, as she turned to go.

In a few minutes, the Jaffrey House was as quiet as it had been noisy most of the evening. Evelyn, happy as she was, felt quite willing to say good-night at once to Rose, and walk home across the quiet park in the starlight with Dick and Joyce. Triumphs are triumphs, but they are tiring, excepting, perhaps, to fortunate possessors of dispositions like that of Joyce.

“I never had such a good time!” declared the late *Miss Bowne*, with unquenchable enthusiasm. “Everybody said we must give another play right away. Let's!”

CHAPTER X

BELOW THE PALISADES

IF the play had been a great triumph, nothing could be more fitting than to celebrate a triumph.

So reasoned all the Linger-Nots at their first meeting after the play. All the compliments of the great evening had been repeated several times apiece, and a letter had been read from the secretary of the Old Landmark Society thanking the girls heartily for the thirty-five dollars, and stating that it was to be used to help buy a beautiful old luster tea-set which the Society had long hoped to secure for the collection. Everyone was more than happy, and in a celebrating mood.

“Now we’ve got to go right on and live up to our name,” said Priscilla. “This play mustn’t be the only thing that we’ll ever have done.”

“Well, let’s do something for ourselves for a change,” suggested Dorothy. “I don’t think that would be wicked. We’re all ready to do something different, too. Let’s go over to the

Palisades on Saturday and spend the day there."

"That's a fine idea," said Priscilla, and everybody agreed, for the fine spring weather was calling everyone out of doors, and the Palisades, a fairyland near home, was an ideal place to spend a day. "Whom shall we ask to go with us?"

"I think it would be nice to invite Miss Phillips," said Evelyn. "She has been so nice helping us with the play that I think it would be only polite to do something for her, and I know she has Saturdays off sometimes in the library, for I've heard her say so."

To this good suggestion the club readily agreed, for Miss Phillips was very popular, and a very good friend to all the girls. Evelyn agreed to bear the invitation to the librarian the next day, when she was going to the library to change her books, and then attention was turned to the important question of what to have to eat on the excursion.

"Sandwiches, of course," said Priscilla. "Who wants to make them? Nobody? That's funny! Well, somebody has got to. You can't have a picnic without sandwiches. Hurry up! This is a call for volunteers!"

"All right, Priscilla, we'll make them," announced Virginia, to the astonishment of all her hearers. "I mean me and Aline and

Helena. We all live in the same house, and we can get up early and make them altogether for everybody."

"*Well!*" began Helena. "Of all the fresh"—but she cut her sentence short, as she caught Aline's warning eye, and subsided.

"I'll come to your house and help, Jinny," announced Muriel, with the sweetest of smiles. Virginia and she had both gained a great deal of self-confidence from their experiences in the play, and Muriel was the staunchest of allies.

"That'll be fine," said Priscilla quickly. "Four is enough to make the sandwiches. I'll make a cake, if you like."

"We do like. Make a big one," advised Dorothy, "and I will bring the family coffee-pot, and I'll carry it, too, I'm not proud. Of course I meant to say that I would also bring the coffee."

"Then Joyce and I will bring bacon, if we're going to have a fire," said Evelyn, "and we can toast it on sticks."

"And I," said Rose, "will bring olives. They're much more important on a picnic than sandwiches are!"

Miss Phillips accepted the flattering invitation of her nine friends with great pleasure, and Saturday morning found the whole company on the Hudson river dock, waiting for their boat, in the best of spirits. Virginia had

completed her triumph over the enemy by making Helena slice all the bread after she had decreed that for ten persons no less than fifty sandwiches would suffice, and was resting comfortably on her laurels. Helena herself was in an excellent mood, because her new and very pretty sport hat made of moire ribbon put everybody else's headgear decidedly in the shade. The sun shone, a light breeze played on the waves, and all that was lacking was the boat, which did not put in an appearance.

"Waiting for the ferry, lady?" inquired a loud voice from the water. It came from a man in a motorboat, which was coquetting invitingly on the waves.

"Yes," replied Miss Phillips. "When does the boat come?"

"Next Saturday," replied the man. "It ain't running yet."

A chorus of groans followed this announcement. The man hastened to add:

"I'll take you all over for fifteen cents apiece, and bring you back, too. I saw you from the other shore and came over."

"Is your boat big enough for all of us?" said Miss Phillips, looking doubtfully at the little craft.

"Sure. I took thirty people over in it last Saturday," declared the proud owner. "She didn't sink, either."

"If you take people over regularly, I guess we'll come."

Miss Phillips spoke a little doubtfully, not altogether attracted by the owner's recommendation of his ship, but the girls were jubilant, and jumped joyfully down into the dancing motorboat. Ten was a tight fit, but they all squeezed in somehow.

"It's ever so much nicer to go in this little boat than in that great big ferryboat where you know nothing's going to happen to you!" cried Virginia, hugging Joyce.

"Nothing'll happen to you in this here boat, either," declared the pilot, swinging the launch around so fast that she nearly spilled half of her passengers overboard. "Why, a week ago Sunday, I took a load of forty people over in her."

"Hey!" cried a stentorian voice in the rear. "Cut out those yarns! What d'ye mean, going over for those folks out of your turn?"

The skipper of the motorboat, like the one of the schooner *Hesperus*, "answered never a word," and without even turning his head, sped his boat toward the opposite shore. The passengers, however, were more curious, and beheld, directly in their wake, another motorboat, even smaller, chasing them at full speed.

"Hey!" called the pilot of this second craft again. "Thought you'd steal my passengers,

did you? You won't take them back, anyhow. Lady, don't you take them girls back in that boat. It sprung a leak last trip!"

"It did not!" cried the owner of the larger boat, letting go of his wheel and turning on the second pilot. "And these here passengers are mine by rights! You went out of turn twice yesterday."

"Never mind what he did!" cried Miss Phillips. "Turn around and attend to your boat! Take us right over to that dock at once. Neither of you has any right to be transporting passengers if you're going to quarrel in the middle of the river like this!"

Thus urged, the first pilot consented to turn around, and in a few minutes the boat was in the shadow of the towering fortresslike Palisades, and the passengers, rather shaken by their trip, though they would rather have died than admit it, stepped ashore. Their skipper received his dollar and a half complacently, and offered to be ready to ferry them back any time in the afternoon that suited their convenience. This was too much for the second motorboat owner, who had trailed the first boat all the way across the wide river with derisive remarks, and he promptly rammed his boat into the first one with such force that both of them nearly capsized at the dock.

"Come away, girls, we're not going home

with either of those men," declared Miss Phillips. "We'll ride down the shore on the trolley to that other ferry that runs all year. Now, let's be thankful we didn't have to swim ashore, and find a good place to make a fire."

Along the foot of the mighty cliffs that stretched for miles along this section of the Hudson, wound a good road that passed beside a fine strip of sandy beach. About a mile from the point where they had landed they found a dry, clean stretch of white sand, where the waves lapped pleasantly on the shore, and where there was a group of rocks that afforded splendid shelter for a fire. Drinking water was piped at intervals along the beach, and as there was a supply not far off, the spot seemed ideal for getting luncheon, which was now the one idea in everybody's mind.

Several of the girls went off to gather firewood, and others collected stones on which to stand the coffee-pot. Dorothy had not only brought this, as she had faithfully promised, but when she took off the lid out came coffee, sugar, condensed milk, and, actually, a box of matches! It was the first time that anyone except herself had thought of them.

Miss Phillips had brought a newspaper with her, and proceeded to tear it into strips. She placed these under a heap of twigs, and reached for the matches.

"I thought you always started a fire outdoors with dry leaves," said Joyce, looking disappointed.

"So you do, in books and in autumn," replied Miss Phillips. "No, Joyce, when people are hungry and all the leaves are green, to quote the song, it pays to remember the value of newspapers as tinder. Now, you see, the fire is really burning. If you and Muriel and Virginia get long twigs, you can toast the bacon. But toast it well!"

"Do, for pity's sake!" begged Dorothy. "Don't you remember that picnic we had at camp last summer, Priscilla, where we served the bacon nearly raw, and every single person there had a stomachache?"

The fire blazed, the coffee boiled, the bacon finally ceased to be flabby and grew crisp, the sandwiches were unpacked. Ten hungry excursionists seated themselves in a circle on the sand around the fire, and fell to.

"I wonder why it is that you always have to eat right away when you go on a picnic," remarked Aline reflectively, after a long pause in the conversation, which was a tribute to the excellence of the cookery. "The eating is always more fun than anything else, and it's over right away."

"Don't let's have it the most fun on this picnic," proposed Dorothy. "I have an idea.

I brought a baseball along, just to throw if we wanted to, but it would be more fun to play baseball really. You saw those four little boys down the beach, didn't you? Well, they have two bats, and maybe if we gave them some cake they would lend us a bat for awhile."

Priscilla's chocolate cake, with marshmallow and chocolate icing, was so large that four liberal pieces were hardly missed, and so delicious that the four little boys were quite open to diplomatic negotiations on the subject of their bat. The Linger-Nots cleared up the beach, burned the papers and rubbish, and, organized by Dorothy, started a rather remarkable but very exciting baseball game.

In a few minutes the four little boys, who had been playing quite contentedly by themselves, came over as spectators of the girls' game. They were very obliging about criticizing the play, and finally one of them kindly offered:

"Here, let me play and show you how to throw that there ball. You don't know nothing about it, but I can learn you, I guess!"

"All right, take my place," said Evelyn, whose pitching was hardly up to some of her other accomplishments. "I'm ready to stop for awhile."

The little boy marched promptly up to the bat, and Evelyn went back to the fire, where

Miss Phillips was watching the coats while the girls played. Evelyn offered to relieve her if she wished to go and watch the game, which was now improving under tuition. So in a moment Evelyn was left by herself on the shore, where she was quite happy watching the great boats that plied between Albany and New York as they passed the point of sand far out in the wide stream, and looking at the tall buildings in the city skyline across the river to the south.

Presently Helena came strolling up, and Evelyn could see that a second small boy was taking her place.

"I'm tired of chasing around that childish way," observed Helena, fanning herself and sitting down on somebody else's coat which was lying on the beach. "What are you doing here, Evelyn?"

"Just staying with the things. I love to watch the boats go up and down here, and just sit and do nothing for awhile. You know this place is new to me, for I've never been across the river at this point before."

"It's lovely, isn't it?" agreed Helena. "I've been here lots of times, though never so early. We used to come over here a great deal in summer, but the last year or two most of us have gone camping for six weeks or so, down on the Jersey mountains. I think we'll go this

year also. Aline and Priscilla were talking about it last night. Couldn't you and Joyce come?"

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Evelyn. "Is everybody else going?"

"Not Muriel, she's going to Canada to her grandmother's. But I think everyone else."

"I don't believe Rose will," said Evelyn doubtfully.

"Why, she said last week she thought she would."

"Well, she told me coming up in the car that she thought she would stay in the city most of the summer."

"What for?"

"Miss Phillips has offered her some work at the library. They're going to make a new card catalogue for the whole library, and she's used to that sort of work, you know, having helped her father with it. So she's thinking of accepting the offer."

"I wonder what on earth for?" asked Helena perplexedly.

"I guess she wants the money for her college course, and she thinks she'd better begin making some," said Evelyn.

"I think it's a shame if she has to work during vacation, when the rest of us are all off having a good time," said Helena "and I wonder what is the matter? I should think her

father would have enough money to start paying her college expenses, anyway. Lots of girls work when they're in college, but she won't be sixteen till September, and I think she ought to have some fun."

There was not a trace of self-consciousness in Helena's voice, and it was quite clear that a girl set on enjoying herself as much as Helena always was felt that other girls should have the same rights. Evelyn looked at her hard, and was convinced that Helena knew nothing of the disappointment that had befallen Rose.

Now Rose had not asked Evelyn to refrain from mentioning the change in the plans for her father's book, and though Evelyn had not spoken to anyone about it, she knew that it was not really a confidential matter. She decided she would tell Helena, and observe the result.

"Rose ought certainly to have some fun," she said, "but I guess she thinks she'll have to put it off awhile. You know that since it has been decided that Mr. Willing's book is not going to be published, she——"

"What?" said Helena, all her maturity disappearing, and giving herself away by her manner in a lamentably "childish" fashion. "Mr. Willing's book isn't coming out?"

"No, not now, anyhow."

Helena sat thunderstruck.

"I guess you hadn't heard that," ventured Evelyn.

"N—n—no, I hadn't. Will it make much difference to them?"

"I don't know how much. I only know that the money from the book was going to help with Rose's college expenses."

"I'm so sorry," said Helena uncomfortably, after a pause. "Do you know, I'm afraid maybe I may be to blame. Of course, I had no idea"—her voice trailed off into silence.

"What do you mean?" Evelyn resolved to give Helena a chance to do her own explaining.

"I'll tell you," said Helena, with sudden decision, "because you've always been so friendly to me—not mean, like the other girls—and I know you'll judge me fairly. You remember what I told you about those papers Mr. Willing was using at the time of the State Library fire? Well, my uncle, Mr. Marsden, the publisher, you know, knew that I lived near the Jaffrey House, and he asked me if I had ever seen Mr. Willing, the curator, who was going to write a book about old ships for him. I told him that I knew Rose at school, and then I remembered that story about the State Library papers, so I thought my uncle ought to know it. He had never heard of it, and he was very much interested, because of course the ship book will give a lot of copies of old

plans and documents. How do you know it isn't going to be published?"

"Rose said her father got a letter from your uncle's firm, saying they could not take it after all."

Helena looked slightly annoyed for a moment, and then her expression changed and she looked uneasy.

"I wonder if Rose thinks I caused any change in the plans?" she inquired.

Evelyn saw that her chance had come to deal with Helena. She hoped she could do it. It would be hard.

"Rose thought that you might in some way be responsible," she replied frankly.

"How long has she thought so?"

"Ever since the letter came—three months ago, I guess."

"She never has said anything about it, nor treated me at all differently from the way she used to."

"Of course not. She had no proof that you had injured her, and she is too honorable to act toward you with suspicion."

"Dear me, what a mess!" sighed Helena. "It does seem a pity uncle isn't taking Mr. Willing's book, if Rose needs the money so, but I couldn't do less than tell him the story, could I?"

"Perhaps not, but you could do more!" cried

Evelyn, exasperated. "You could go and tell him that Mr. Willing has a letter from the State Library exonerating him from responsibility in the accident!"

"How do you know he has?"

"Rose told me so. Of course that doesn't find the papers, but it does express confidence in him."

"Why, I never heard of it. Honestly, never."

"Well, I hope you're satisfied with the mischief you've done, Helena, passing around an old story that you didn't get straight in the first place! You've spoiled Rose's plans, and hurt Mr. Willing, and kept your uncle's firm from getting a good book. And you say people are mean to you! Whose fault is it? This is what comes of trying to be grown-up before you know how!" declared Evelyn, determined to tell Helena the truth once, partly, it must be confessed, to relieve her own feelings, however much she desired the reformation of Helena's character.

For one moment Helena looked exceedingly angry. Evelyn braced herself for an explosion. To her astonishment, the rage suddenly died out of the other girl's face, and her color disappeared.

"I guess you are right, Evelyn," she said very quietly, and without a trace of resentment.

Then she got up, strolled down the beach by herself, and left Evelyn, almost stunned, sitting alone by the fire.

"Helena! Helena!" called Virginia's shrill voice, "don't go too far off, because Miss Phillips says we'll have to start home soon."

Virginia came running along the beach from the direction of the baseball game, and flung herself down beside Evelyn.

"It's a perfect shame," she grumbled, "that we can't go home on that dear little boat. The reason we have to start early is because the trolley-car takes half an hour longer."

"I'm sorry, Jinny," said Miss Phillips, who was following her, "but we must try to make up for the disappointment somehow. You'll get the river trip further down, even if it is on a horrid, safe ferryboat, and I propose that we walk through the woods to the second trolley stop, and get some flowers to take home. There is a great deal of dogwood out, and we may find some late violets."

This suggestion was very favorably received, and when, presently, it was time to leave the beach, just at the loveliest hour, when the shadows on the water were growing long, and the late afternoon air was getting still, the lost excitement of the foregone motorboat was amply compensated for by the treasures to be found in the woods along the trolley-track.

There dogwood, violets, and mountain laurel bloomed, and in an open meadow in a cleared space the field flowers were beginning to show their colors.

Joyce and Virginia and Muriel were particularly happy over the daisies and clovers, old friends of all of them, and when Virginia found a buttercup she shrieked for joy.

"I'm going to be rich!" she cried. "Joyce, do you love butter?"

"What absolute babies!" said Helena crossly.

"Oh, come, Helena," said Miss Phillips mildly, "don't be too hard on them! Don't you know that buttercups have meant riches, in the language of flowers, for no one knows how long?"

Helena did not condescend to answer, so Evelyn asked:

"Do all flowers mean something, Miss Phillips?"

"I believe they're supposed to, my dear. No one knows the language any more, I'm afraid, though long ago it was a subject of the most intense interest to all young ladies. They used to interpret every bouquet they received, to see what meaning it might convey. I believe we have a curious old book in the library about the language of flowers, now that you speak of it, but it stays on the shelf the year round.

Still, I thought everybody knew the meaning of buttercups. Now, have we all got everything we can carry? I hear the trolley-car."

By all, except two members of the party, the picnic was voted a complete success. Even the mishap of the motorboat, at a little distance, gave the affair a sort of distinction, and if it had not occurred, the homes along the parkway and on Straiton Court would not have been blooming with spring flowers that evening.

What Helena thought of the day was not revealed, as she scarcely spoke all the way home. As for Evelyn, she lay awake a long time that night, thinking over all that had taken place that eventful day.

She hoped she had not said too much to Helena. But she could regret nothing she had said, and therefore was willing to wait for results. Her real regret was for Rose, whose vacation seemed doomed to be much curtailed, and the regret grew as she thought that perhaps Rose would be the only one of the nine Linger-Nots whom she might not see at camp. If she could only help Rose!

In all other respects she had enjoyed the day intensely, and perhaps most of all the tramp along the cliff to gather the flowers. She was reminded of it by the very faint odor of some buttercups, which Virginia, her ever-faithful admirer, had pressed on her at parting, though

Evelyn felt that she was taking the child's dearest possession when she accepted them.

Evelyn was growing sleepy. It seemed to her that these were not the first buttercups she had seen that season. How absurd! Where else— Oh, yes, on that sampler the other evening. The sampler with the Jaffrey House and the flowers. Buttercups meant riches, and flowers meant—why, all sorts of things, Miss Phillips had said. How curious!

A sudden thought took possession of Evelyn's mind. She laughed at it, scolded it, contradicted it. It remained firmly fixed. It was a strange and fantastic idea, but she could not get rid of it.

"The first chance I get," she promised herself, as she finally dropped off to sleep, "I shall look at that 'curious old book' in the library."

CHAPTER XI

THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS

NOT for forty-eight long hours did the opportunity come, for the library was closed on Sunday, and Monday, until three o'clock, was taken up with school. There was no club meeting that afternoon, however, as it was so soon after Saturday's frolic, so when Evelyn reached home she called Rose on the telephone as soon as she could make up her mind to make a very curious request.

"Listen, Rose," she begged, "I want to ask you to do something for me that I know you'll think is ever so queer. And will you please not ask me any questions or think I've suddenly gone crazy? . . . Oh, you *are* used to me by this time! . . . Well, that doesn't hurt my feelings! . . . Will you please go downstairs and look at that sampler those ladies were so excited about the other night, and tell me all the kinds of flowers there are on it? . . . No, I'm *not* going to write a sequel to the play! . . .

Rose, do stop teasing and do what I ask you. I'll hold the wire."

In a short interval Rose's voice came across the wire:

"There are only three kinds, Evelyn: iris, buttercups, and nasturtiums. Why on earth do you want to know? Oh, I forgot, I'm not to ask questions."

"Is that all?" said Evelyn disappointedly. "Then I don't believe—well, anyhow, I'm much obliged. I'll see you to-morrow. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver, and sat a moment thinking.

"It's hardly worth while taking too much trouble for only three," she mused. "Still, I'm going to change my book anyhow. All right, I'll do it."

She strolled over to the library leisurely, for it was a warm day, and there she found Miss Phillips, sun-burned and merry, sorting out piles of catalogue cards in preparation for the new list that was soon to be begun.

"Your friend Rose is going to help with this, you know," she announced to Evelyn, after they had talked over the fun of Saturday. "I asked her definitely when we were over at the Palisades, and she has decided to spend one month of her vacation here with me, and one month in the country. Now, what can I do for you to-day, Evelyn?"

"I'd like to look at the book you told us about on the language of flowers," answered Evelyn rather shyly, for she felt it was an unusual request, and something made her unwilling to be questioned as to her purpose.

"Very well. It's a strange old book, out of print long ago, and so we keep it locked up and don't let it go out of the library," said Miss Phillips, taking a key out of a drawer in her desk. "I don't think anybody has asked for it for years."

She unlocked a bookcase in one corner of the room, where unusual books were kept, and handed Evelyn a small black volume which still bore traces of elaborate gilding on the cover. The title was "The Lady's Bouquet."

"You'll give that back to me when you have finished with it, won't you?" asked Miss Phillips, and Evelyn, promising to remember, sat down at one of the tables which was decorated with some of the dogwood Miss Phillips had gathered on Saturday, and opened the book.

The idea she had conceived seemed to her almost fantastic, and she hesitated to turn the pages for a moment. Still, what would be the harm in carrying it out? Neither Rose nor Miss Phillips would ask questions, and if the idea turned out to be as silly as she almost thought it was, no one would ever know that it had been hers.

Evelyn glanced at the page before her. She had opened at the index, which was arranged in columns, headed respectively: "Flower"—"Sentiment"—"Page." The flowers were arranged alphabetically, and each one appeared to have a page containing its history, and a suitable poem appended, for the delight of ladies who wished to understand their bouquets.

"Rose said 'iris, buttercups, nasturtiums,'" thought Evelyn. "I'll look up iris."

She ran her finger down the flower column. There, in the midst of the "I" list, appeared "Iris," and opposite were the words: "I have a message for you."

Evelyn almost bounded from her seat, and began to tremble. It was all very well to fancy that a young lady of long ago might choose flowers of a special significance for her embroidery, but no one could ever have imagined a personal message coming out of the past!

"Buttercups I know," thought Evelyn excitedly, "they were what gave me the idea of looking all the flowers up. 'I have a message for you—riches'—what do nasturtiums mean?'"

"The Lady's Bouquet" informed her that they meant "patriotism." This was rather confusing.

"'I have a message for you—riches—patriotism,'" puzzled Evelyn. "What on earth can it mean? I'm sure there must be other flowers

on the sampler. Rose must have overlooked something. Shall I go over and look at it? Would she laugh at me if I told her what I have discovered so far? I don't believe she would. Anyhow, if the iris says 'I have a message for you,' I believe there is one, and I'm going to find out!"

She handed back the little black volume to the librarian, and entirely forgetting the story-book she had originally come to the library to draw out, she betook herself as fast as she could to the Jaffrey House. How much she regretted her leisurely stroll over to the library! The afternoon was nearly gone now. However, she could reach the museum before it closed.

She entered the house by the front door, which was open to the public, and went straight to the room where the curiosities were installed, to examine the sampler minutely.

Rose had been quite right. There were only three flowers embroidered on the light brown linen. Nor was there apparently any detail that had escaped Evelyn's notice before. The yellow house, the red roof with the smoke coming out of the second chimney, the sheltering tree, looked exactly the same. Evelyn pondered and pondered, standing motionless before the wall. She read the verse over and over again.

“ ‘Mixed my zest and skill with thought,
That the world might understand
How I loved my native land,’ ”

she repeated in a perplexity which did not shake her conviction that something lay behind the embroidered legend.

“Hello there!” cried Rose, coming into the room behind her. “Evelyn Barry, what are you doing here? After that sampler again? Was there ever such a girl!”

“Oh, you startled me!” laughed Evelyn. “How did you know I was here?”

“I was in father’s office, and I heard a dear familiar voice talking to itself next door. Evelyn, do tell me what you are up to. I shall be worried about you if you fuss over that sampler any more!”

“All right, Rose,” said Evelyn, taking a sudden resolve, “I’ll tell you, and if you want to laugh at me, you can.”

“I never want to laugh at you, honey,” said Rose, hugging her. “Now, tell me, you’ll feel better right away.”

“Well, I think that sampler means more than it says.”

“Why do you? And what does it mean?”

“Because, in the first place, it’s very unusual. It attracts everybody’s attention. With that verse, it isn’t like an ordinary sampler at

all. Then the verse says that the sampler was made 'with thought' so 'that the world might understand.' It seems as if there was some special reason for it. And, Rose, I've just been to the library and looked up the flowers in the book Miss Phillips told us about on Saturday, and the iris means 'I have a message for you!' "

"Really?" said Rose. "Evelyn, how do you ever think of such things? What do the other flowers mean?"

"The buttercups mean 'riches,' you know, and Miss Phillips saying that, and telling us how the language of flowers used to be such a popular interest with young ladies was what really put the idea into my head, because there is such a profusion of buttercups worked across the middle of the sampler, right over the roof of the house. The nasturtiums mean 'patriotism,' and of course those three meanings, 'a message, riches, patriotism,' don't make very good sense, I admit. I believe there's more that we haven't discovered."

"There are no more flowers," said Rose, shaking her head. "If there is a further meaning, it must be in something else embroidered on the sampler. There's the tree, but of course that's not a flower."

"But trees do have meanings!" cried Evelyn, excitedly. "I saw 'Oak' right under 'Nas-

turtium' in the book! I never thought of that! Oh, I wonder what sort of tree that is!"

"We never can tell that," said Rose decidedly. "It's just a tree, that's all. Who could embroider a tree that size so you could tell what kind it was?"

"But look! The view of the house shows it standing right alongside the corner where your room is. The branch goes right above your window. *Perhaps the tree's still there!*"

"There's nothing but an old stump of a juniper-tree there now," said Rose. "The tall trees are down around the sitting-room."

"But you say it's old," said Evelyn, hopefully. "I am going to that library to look up 'juniper-tree!'"

"Now? Why, it's ten minutes of six. The library will be shut in ten minutes."

"All right, I'll run all the way. Good-by!"

"Wait till I get my hat and I'll come too!" cried Rose, catching Evelyn's enthusiasm in spite of her conviction that her friend was probably doomed to disappointment. And in a moment both girls were running up the park-way.

Evelyn was no mean sprinter, and Rose had much ado to keep up with her, though she was taller and more athletic than Evelyn. The force of Evelyn's idea seemed to put wings on her feet, and the two girls arrived at the library

just before Miss Phillips was pulling down the shades and preparing to go.

"That 'Lady's Bouquet' again? Why, Evelyn, I'm afraid I got you too much excited about the language of flowers," said Miss Phillips, obligingly unlocking the bookcase door again.

"No, I'm not a bit excited," averred Evelyn, nearly strangling herself in an effort to control her breath and appear quite calm. "There's just one thing we want to look up, Miss Phillips, and we won't keep you."

She opened the little black volume again, with Rose looking over her shoulder. Once more she ran her finger down the page till it reached "Juniper," and then across the page to the meaning. It was: "A hiding-place."

"Rose," cried Evelyn, as the two friends gazed at each other thunderstruck, "that sampler says: 'I have a message for you. Riches—hiding-place—patriotism!'"

CHAPTER XII

HELENA MAKES ANOTHER IMPRESSION

“**W**HAT shall we do now, Evelyn?” asked Rose respectfully, as the two girls found themselves again in the street in front of the library. Neither of them knew exactly how they had got there, so dazed were they both by their discovery.

“We must find the hiding-place,” said Evelyn decidedly.

“How?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea, unless we study the sampler some more.”

“We will, then. I wish we could do it right away, but I have to go home and help mother, for there are some people coming to dinner. Can you come over to-morrow afternoon, right after school?”

“Yes, and we’ll look at every separate thread in that sampler if we have to!” declared Evelyn. “I don’t know how I can ever wait!”

“Nor I! Bother that company! Evelyn, do you suppose we’ll find buried treasure?”

“How do I know? Now, don’t go supposing anything, because we may stick forever right where we are.”

“Oh, no, you’ll think of something,” prophesied Rose with touching faith. “I do hope I’ll live until to-morrow!”

After a restless night, during which she dreamed that she had to pass an examination in the language of flowers, and was digging up sacks of gold buried under the juniper-tree, Evelyn surprised her mother by being very punctual for breakfast, and making an early start for school. She hoped to see Rose a few minutes before school opened, so they could again talk over yesterday’s wonderful discovery.

Just as she came downstairs to the entry-hall, in joyful anticipation, the doorbell rang. Evelyn opened it, and there, to her disappointment, and indeed, rather to her annoyance, stood Helena, whom she had not seen since the day of the picnic.

“Are you just starting for school?” asked Helena. “I’ll walk over with you, and we might go slowly, because I have something to tell you.”

“Oh, dear!” thought Evelyn, but she agreed politely, and started at once, though now she saw it was useless to think of seeing Rose before the afternoon.

"I guess you're surprised to see me," began Helena, "but I hope you won't mind my coming when I tell you what I've done."

She seemed to speak with difficulty, and Evelyn thought it best to say nothing, but to listen in silence.

"When I got home on Saturday, I was so angry over what you had said to me that I made up my mind I'd never go near you again! That's the truth, Evelyn, and I thought I'd tell you that first, because I want you to see how completely I've changed my mind."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Helena," said Evelyn regretfully.

"It was a good thing you did," said Helena with amazing frankness. "You made me see what people thought of me, but that alone would never have made me do what I have done. Yesterday I went and told my uncle that I had not told him all of the story about Mr. Willing, because I had never heard it, and so had left out the most important part."

"Helena! Did you really? What did he say?"

"Well—never mind what he said first. He was quite nice afterwards, and said to leave the matter with him and he would see if he could do anything about it. He was pretty angry about the book, because he felt that he should have been able to get it out some time ago. All I

wanted to tell you was that I did try to undo some of the harm that I did just because I wanted to make an impression."

"I think you were very brave," declared Evelyn. "I don't see how you ever did it."

"I didn't like to, and I almost didn't do it at all. The reason I finally did was because of what you said about Rose being so honorable to me. I hadn't been at all honorable to her. I always felt annoyed because she seemed to get everything she wanted, even though it's entirely different from what I want. I don't seem to get anything I really like—so far."

"Oh, Helena, you mustn't be discouraged," said Evelyn sympathetically. "The sort of things you want take lots of time to get! I think it has been splendid of you to act so honorably, and I shouldn't wonder at all if your uncle might take Mr. Willing's book yet, and then Rose's college plans will be all right again. She will think as much of you as I do when she knows what you did."

"I can't tell her," sighed Helena, "for she never, as you know, said a word to me about her suspecting I had told the story in the first place."

"Well, I'll tell her, if you like. You don't want her to go on suspecting, do you? She really ought to know that you did what you

could to undo the wrong, even if nothing more comes of it."

"Very well, I should like her to know, even if she never speaks to me again."

"Why, you foolish girl," cried Evelyn, "she'll speak to you now even if she never did before! Don't you see, she'll respect you. And so do I."

"Perhaps," said Helena slowly, "that's what's always been the matter with me. Nobody respected me, and I never knew it. I just thought people were mean."

"People are not mean," declared Evelyn. "Whoever they can respect, they are friends with."

"Then that, Evelyn, is the reason I always wanted to be friends with you," said Helena. "It wasn't only because you were clever, and I hate dull people, but because I knew you were always honorable and kind, and never mean. You weren't mean even on Saturday, when you scolded me so! And after I had thought over everything you said, I believed you had told me the truth. I did pass around gossip just so that people would think I was grown up, and I saw that you were the only girl I knew who was a good enough friend to tell me so. That was why I went back to my uncle."

"I'm going to see Rose this afternoon, and everything will be absolutely all right!" whis-

pered Evelyn, as they reached the school door.

But nothing that day seemed to turn out the way it was planned.

When Evelyn arrived at Rose's apartment, she found Rose absolutely unable to speak of anything except the sampler. Fired by Evelyn's ingenuity, Rose had made up her mind that the stanza on the sampler might contain a secret message in the form of a code, an acrostic, or a hidden sentence, and she had covered her desk with scraps of paper on which were written such remarkable sentiments as "I have mixed that how," taken from the first words of lines, and "nfwultt," made by combining the initials of the final words.

When Evelyn scoffed at these ideas as being obscure, Rose defended them on the ground that codes were not intended to be too plain. However, she was not entirely satisfied with her own results, and proposed that they should go and study the sampler together again.

This time they both got chairs and sat down in front of it.

"We'll spend the afternoon here if we have to," declared Rose. "Now, Evelyn, it's your turn to think of something bright."

Evelyn gazed at the sampler intently for about ten minutes before she replied. Then she said:

"I believe that the whole trouble has been

that we've tried to be too bright all along. I've looked for mysteries so hard that there's a perfectly simple thing there that I've never noticed, and neither have you. Look at the date."

"'August 29, 1814,' " read Rose. "What of it?"

"And you notice that the tree is in full leaf?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"Nothing, except that there's smoke coming out of the second chimney—*your* chimney. Would you have a fire in your room in August?"

"Well, hardly. It does seem strange. And look here!" cried Rose, "I am going to have one little idea about this wonderful discovery! I have noticed all along that the tree is rather queerly shaped, and that it has one branch pointed straight to the chimney. That makes the smoke you speak of even more noticeable."

"So it does. Good for you! I never saw it at all, I was so busy finding out that it was a juniper-tree, and what juniper means. *Rose!* Juniper means 'a hiding-place!'"

"It must be near the chimney in my room! Evelyn," cried Rose, in intense excitement. "Father has often told me that they built secret rooms in old houses around the chimneys! Do you suppose——"

"I don't know anything about it," cried Evelyn, "but why not ask your father? He's here, isn't he?"

Rose was out of the room before the second sentence was out of Evelyn's lips, and the next instant the bewildered Mr. Willing was being dragged into the room by his daughter.

"Father, is there a secret room in this house? And you never told me!" cried Rose reproachfully, beginning at the very end of the girls' discovery.

"Oh, Mr. Willing, you know the language of flowers, don't you?" cried Evelyn, trying to direct the narrative along its regular order of events, but only throwing Mr. Willing into further confusion.

"I fear I do not gather exactly what you wish to convey," he murmured mildly, looking from one to the other in perplexity.

"Then listen, father dear," said Rose, pushing him down into the chair she had vacated. "Evelyn has been too bright for anything and has figured out that the flowers on this sampler mean something. Never mind the flowers just now, I'll tell you what they mean: 'I have a message for you—riches—hiding-place—patriotism.' It's the juniper-tree that means 'hiding-place,' by the way. Then *I* had an idea—aren't you terribly proud of me?—it was my idea, wasn't it, Evelyn?——"

"Yes, yes, it was wonderful! Go on!"

"—and I noticed that the branch of the tree points to my chimney. So Evelyn thinks the hiding-place is by my chimney, and you know you told me that secret rooms used to be built around chimneys, father. Now, you mustn't deny it! So don't you think there's a secret room in this house?"

"Oh, I begin to comprehend your meaning," admitted Mr. Willing. "My dear young ladies, you are most ingenious, but I rather fear that you may be disappointed. I have never heard of a secret room in connection with this house, and it is not built anything like the Colonial mansions with which one associates secret chambers. However, there is no reason why you should not try to find one, if you like."

"We do like," said Rose, decidedly. "Evelyn, let's go right up to my room and look for it!"

"How?" demanded Evelyn. "Shall we pound on the walls?"

"Yes, and look for cracks, and loose planks in the floor," said Rose, becoming imaginative.

"I fear there are none of that sort of planks, my dear, nor, indeed, any planks," observed her father. "I don't want to discourage you, but don't raise your hopes too high. You know there was a parquet flooring put down there last fall, and the walls were repapered."

"Never mind," said Rose valiantly. "We'll think of something else, if we have to. That is, Evelyn will. She's had all the ideas—except one. Come on, Evelyn. And, father, be all ready to come up and see what we find!"

Mr. Willing was a serious, studious man and he did not laugh often, but the enthusiasm and assurance of the girls were humorous. He laughed aloud.

"Splendid youth!" he banteringly called out to them. "You run like kittens after flying leaves and chase rainbows as a part of your happiness. I'll come when you find anything, but I'm not making large wagers that there is anything for you to find."

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE SECOND CHIMNEY

UP the little rear staircase flew Rose and Evelyn, and down the narrow hall to Rose's room. With one accord they dashed to the brick fireplace, tossed all the mantelpiece ornaments on the bed, dragged chairs over to the fireplace, and, mounting on them, began to knock tentatively and in breathless silence on the wall above the mantelshelf.

"I don't hear anything, do you?" whispered Rose, after numerous attempts to find a hollow spot.

"No, I'm going to knock harder," replied Evelyn.

She pounded valiantly with her full strength. The only sound was a heavy thud of knuckles on a solid wall.

"Try on your side, Rose. Knock hard!"

"Ouch!" cried Rose, complying and promptly wringing both hands. "I believe these bricks are right under the wall-paper! Plaster would be much softer."

“Let’s try somewhere else—on this side by the window,” suggested Evelyn, climbing down and moving her chair into the corner of the room between the window and the jutting fireplace. “Come, I’ll try the upper wall, and you get down on the floor and try the wood-work.”

This plan produced nothing but more bruises, and an expression of unwilling admiration from both girls for the extreme solidity with which masons built houses in the last century. Rose sat down on the floor and nursed her wounds.

“We might dig up some bricks from the hearth,” she suggested. “Perhaps there would be something underneath.”

“All right, but let’s begin on loose bricks,” said Evelyn. “My knuckles are all skinned, and I don’t want to break all my finger-nails, too.”

Unfortunately a close study of the hearth revealed not a single loose brick. Indeed, the mortar looked rather fresh and new and determined to hold firmly.

“That’s no good,” said Rose, somewhat discouraged, “and as father said, the floor has just been put down.”

“The wax isn’t even scratched, not to mention cracks,” admitted Evelyn. “Well, why not try the other side of the fireplace?”

"Oh, nonsense, you know that chimney is perfectly solid! I don't know how the smoke gets through it!" grumbled Rose.

"Oh, come on, it's not going to take long or hurt—very much," urged Evelyn. "Come and help me drag this big wooden box out of the corner here."

She seized hold of one of the handles of a chest which nearly filled the corner between the jutting fireplace and the wall opposite the window. Rose reluctantly took the other handle, and began to drag the chest out of the corner, with Evelyn pushing it from behind, for it was extremely heavy.

"What do you have this here for, Rose?"

"Because my closet is about as big as the broom-closet in most people's kitchens, and I have to keep my clothes somewhere. I hardly ever move it. Goodness, it's heavy! Well, there!"

Rose gave the chest a sudden violent jerk into the middle of the room. Evelyn, not expecting the jerk, was thrown entirely off her balance, pulled forward by the heavy chest, and, slipping on the polished floor, crashed down full length in the corner, with a hollow thud that echoed through the room!

"Oh, Evelyn, are you hurt? I'm so sorry, it was all my fault!" cried Rose. "But did you hear that echo?"

“Yes,” said Evelyn, sitting up rather dazed, “it was in the floor—or else in my head.”

“Indeed it wasn’t! It was in the wainscoting, my dear Evelyn. Your foot hit it when you fell.”

Evelyn, fully restored by this information, bounded up and began to knock on the three panels of mahogany which ran along the side of the chimney. Every tap brought a hollow sound.

“I believe we’ve found what we’re looking for,” said Rose quietly. “The next thing to do is to get those panels open.”

How to do so was the question. There was no handle and no way of getting a leverage on the panels. The wainscoting refused to move up when the girls tried to lift it, and remained firmly fixed when they inserted their fingertips in the cracks of the paneling and pulled in various directions. Rose inserted a button-hook in several of the small holes worn along the edge of the wainscoting with no results other than to prove that there was an empty space behind it, as foretold by the knocking. But the more stubborn the problem remained, the more determined were the two girls to solve it.

“Let’s ask your father to help us,” suggested Evelyn finally, “if he wouldn’t mind coming. Anyway, we really have something to show him now!”

"All right," agreed Rose, and dashed down the hall, returning almost instantly with her father, who had been in the family sitting-room.

"Now, then, father, listen!" she cried, tapping all over the three panels, and much enjoying Mr. Willing's astonishment. "We found this because Evelyn insisted on exploring this corner, and fell down and smashed her head on the floor and thought it was hollow. I assure you that the contrary is the truth. Now, father dear, we've done all the work. You open this place for us."

"I suppose the thing to do is to try for a spring," said Mr. Willing. "This is a most interesting discovery, girls. I'll begin on this panel at the edge of the fireplace, and go toward the wall."

"I do believe our heads are both hollow, after all," declared Rose. "I never thought of a spring, did you, Evelyn, though we nearly knocked the whole place to pieces trying to get it open."

Mr. Willing was carefully pressing on every inch of the waiscoting in turn, slowly and thoroughly. The first panel gave no results of any kind. He proceeded to the second, and still the woodwork remained immovable. The girls were getting anxious.

"Don't worry," he said, seeing the expres-

sion on their faces. "If this little experiment won't work, we can easily have this wainscoting removed. There, that finishes the second panel. Now for the last. Cheer up! It's always darkest before dawn."

The girls watched his skillful fingers anxiously, as they slowly moved down the third panel. There was not a sound in the room. The center of the panel had been passed, and Mr. Willing had almost reached the floor.

"Oh, dear," breathed Rose, "I don't believe——"

A faint click interrupted her. With the strangest, rustiest creak, the third panel moved slightly, and then the second. Then all was silence.

"It's open," said Mr. Willing, and slipping his hand behind the third panel, he slid it on top of the second, and, as he did so, the second slid back on top of the first. All that could be seen in the opening was the beginning of a staircase, steep, covered with dust, and perhaps eighteen inches wide.

"Let's go up!" cried Rose, rushing toward the opening, but her father held her back.

"I will go up first," he said. "We don't know what's there."

"Oh, please let us go too! Call us, please, when you get up to—to wherever the stairs go!"

"Very well, I will," promised Mr. Willing, stooping down and entering the opening on the stairs, which was less than four feet high.

His feet sounded on the stairs. He went up, up, up. The steps grew fainter and fainter, yet still the sound of them continued.

"He must have got to the moon by this time!" cried Rose in an agony of suspense. "Father!"

"Yes! You can both come up!" came Mr. Willing's answering voice.

Bobbing their heads under the wall above the open panels, the two girls found themselves in a sort of cylinder built close against the chimney, which contained the little staircase. It was so narrow that a large person would have had difficulty in mounting it. On and on it wound, and the middle of it was so nearly dark that the girls had to feel their way along the walls. Finally a ray of light appeared ahead, and after a few more steep steps they found themselves with Mr. Willing, in a rather wide, but very low ceilinged room.

"Congratulations!" he cried, helping them up the last step. "The Jaffrey House really has a secret room after all, and I must say that it is one of the most cleverly concealed that I have ever seen."

"Where are we, Mr. Willing?" said Evelyn, rather confused.

"In the very top of the roof, in what people sometimes call the second story of it, in fact."

"Why, here's a window!" cried Rose, running across the empty room. "I never noticed a window here in the roof, did you, father?"

"No, my dear, and I believe that the reason is that that window, which you see is very low, even for the room, is made to look like an upper sash of the garret window below. I think that must be the explanation, for it is right on the same side of the house. Now we know why that garret is so small. The roof was evidently designed to slope the way it does to conceal this chamber, and the staircase does cut off a small space on the side of the garret."

"I wonder what the room was built for," said Evelyn.

"It's impossible to tell. These rooms in old houses are supposed to have been refuges in time of war, or hiding-places from Indians, but just what this one was for it would be hard to say."

"Isn't it too bad the people didn't furnish it," sighed Rose, glancing at the bare walls and floor. "Then we might have known a little more about what it was used for."

"I think they did leave something over there in that dark corner," said Evelyn. "Don't you see that heap of stuff on the floor?"

Mr. Willing and the two girls quickly crossed

the little chamber, and with intense curiosity bent over the "heap of stuff."

"This is a piece of cloth," said Rose, touching a covering wrapped around the heap. "How dusty it is! Let's pull it off and see what's underneath."

She unwrapped the cloth, and out of it fell two objects, both made of black leather. One was a large, heavy case for papers, the handle of which broke off as she lifted it. The case, however, remained firmly shut. It was sealed with three heavy red seals along the flap. Evelyn picked up the other object as it fell. It was a book with a gilt clasp, and on the cover the initials, "E. J."

"'E. J.'—Esther Jaffrey!" cried Evelyn, staggering back in amazement, and Rose, no less astounded, nearly dropped the case she was holding.

"Very likely," said Mr. Willing. "Let us go downstairs at once and examine these things. The dust here will choke us all in a few minutes more."

He stooped and picked up several strips of wood which were the only other objects remaining in the room, and then followed the excited girls downstairs. They carefully shut the door into the secret passage, and betook themselves at once to the sitting-room to examine their discoveries.

Mr. Willing broke the seals on the case, and putting in his hand, drew out a large number of papers, rather yellow with age. They seemed to be covered with drawings and rough sketches. Rose and Evelyn looked at them in perplexity, for the pictures conveyed no meaning whatever to them, as they seemed to be drawings only of machinery. Mr. Willing, however, clearly understood them. He stared at them with mingled delight and stupefaction, then desperately plunged his hand into the case again, and, to his evident relief, drew out a small flat notebook, which bore on the cover, in faint black ink, the words "Peter Ward: Records."

"My dear children!" ejaculated Mr. Willing, "this is a most extraordinary discovery!"

"Who was Peter Ward?" asked Rose. "Did you ever hear of him before, father?"

"Dear child! Peter Ward was an early American engineer of great ability!" said Mr. Willing with mild reproach. "Now, I must ask you to let me look over these papers at once."

"Just one second, father," pleaded Rose, "Evelyn and I want to see this black leather book. Do open it, Evelyn!"

Evelyn tugged at the clasp, and it immediately gave way. The girls eagerly bent over the faded title-page. It bore the legend: "My Diary. Esther Jaffrey."

"Oh, can't we take this to my room and look at it while you're reading the papers, father?" cried Rose. "We'll take such good care of it!"

Mr. Willing, already absorbed in the documents before him, nodded. The girls flew down the hall in breathless excitement.

"Just wait until I shake this dusty cloth out of the window," cried Rose, "and then we'll sit down and read Esther's diary! Evelyn, did you ever have anything so exciting happen to you?"

She threw open the window, and shook clouds of dust out of the cloth which she had carried down from the secret room. Its color grew lighter, and from being a dingy gray it became a yellowish white.

"Look here," said Rose, "this cloth is embroidered, and beautifully embroidered."

"It's not a cloth," said Evelyn, seizing one end, "it has fringe on both ends. It looks like a scarf!"

"If we make any more discoveries to-day, I shall go crazy!" declared Rose. "Come, let's start on that diary."

Side by side, the two girls pored over Esther's book. The beautiful, fine old-fashioned writing was clear and distinct.

"'May 2, 1814,'" read Evelyn. "She was sixteen then. It's the same year that she made the sampler. Or, look, Rose," as her eye ran

down the page, "this is all about the war, and about her home here, and her garden! Let's read every word, so we can tell the other girls about it."

"I know something better," said Rose. "Let's ask them all to come right over, and read it out loud! I think they all will except Helena, perhaps, and I can't help it if she won't."

"Oh, she'll come!" cried Evelyn. "I forgot to tell you I came over this afternoon especially to tell you about Helena, and I never thought of it once! She wanted me to let you know what she has done. You were right, Rose, and she did tell that story to her uncle, just as you suspected. But after—after she thought it over,"—Evelyn modestly omitted her part in making Helena think it over—"she was very sorry, and she went and told her uncle that she had left out the fact of your father's having that letter from the State Library. She had honestly never heard of it, and she has done everything she could to undo the terrible thing she did."

"The idea! I never would have believed it of Helena!" said Rose, frankly. "I think you're at the bottom of this, Evelyn, for someone must have talked to her. Well, I think a whole lot more of Helena than I ever did before in my life, and I shall go and telephone to

her first of all the girls. Now, I'll go and ask mother if I may invite them, and you look over the diary."

Never, surely, did minute-men report faster to their posts than did the Linger-Nots to the Jaffrey House on receipt of Rose's telephone messages. Helena was the first to arrive, and when Rose came upstairs with her, Evelyn saw that the two girls had come to a complete understanding. For three girls, it was the happiest moment of all that happy day.

Right on Helena's heels came Aline and Virginia, Joyce, Muriel, Priscilla, and Dorothy. They squeezed into Rose's pretty room and found places on the bed, the hearth, and the wooden chest, which still stood in the middle of the floor. Evelyn was voted into the rocking-chair, and requested to read without delay.

"Very well, if Rose will go on when I'm tired," she agreed. "Now, girls, this is the way it begins":

CHAPTER XIV

ESTHER'S DIARY

MAY 2, 1814. My beloved parents have always encouraged me to keep a diary ever since I reached my ninth year, but hitherto a single notebook has sufficed to record each year's events. This sad year of 1814 is the first when I have had to begin a second volume.

The reason is not far to seek. It has been my painful duty to record a succession of terrible disasters which have befallen the American cause in the long and discouraging struggle which has been trying our country to the utmost for two long years. Things seem to go from bad to worse.

At present, the blockade of the British fleet along our whole Atlantic coast keeps our fighting-ships in harbor, and over a thousand of our merchantmen have been captured. My father says that never has he known business to be so bad, nor so many men unable to find work. He and my mother have given much time to reliev-

ing the distress of the poor. Food is very scarce and high, because it is impossible to transport it in sufficient quantities owing to the blockade. Many of our friends have been collecting and sending away to the West large sums of money for the relief of the unfortunate settlers on the Niagara frontier, where recently the Indians massacred inhabitants of six villages. Shall we ever see an end of these terrible times?

It is selfish to think of oneself in such circumstances, yet I confess I was glad when the time came yesterday to leave our noisy town home, as we always do in May, and come up here to our peaceful country residence for six months.

There is so little that a girl like myself can do for our cause, in the righteousness of which I firmly believe, though many who proclaim themselves Americans differ with me, that no doubt I can do it as well here as anywhere else. I can at least make this house a pleasant place for my two brothers and our cousins, who remain in town to drill with their regiments, which are assigned to the defense of New York in event of an invasion. If they get leave, they can come here with their friends to rest.

I was up early this morning working in my garden, which is behind the maple-grove overlooking the river. The iris has come up again from last year, and is beginning to bloom in all

its splendor. It has evidently been a stormy winter, for part of the ivy that covers the wall behind the garden has been torn off, and some of the stonework around the beds has been washed away. I had a talk with Ruggles, our gardener, about the damage, and he suggests my planting a screen of sweet-peas against the wall, as they grow so fast that they will soon cover the bare spot. I will do this, and after I have set out the beds, I will plant nasturtiums around the stonework, and they will soon hide the new stones, that look so strange in the old gray border. Ruggles predicts a splendid season this year for our gardens.

It is agreeable to know that any prospects are encouraging, even those of flower-beds, which do not at present seem very important, though hitherto my flowers have been my chief love.

When the sun rose high, I came indoors and busied myself with my needlework, and later came up here to my old private haunt in the little room under the second chimney, where scarcely anyone but myself ever comes. This cell-like row of rooms is seldom used even for guests, so I can write and think here without interruption. The view across the wide green meadows to the south, where buttercups and daisies are now appearing, is peaceful and inspiring.

May 16. My father returned from his ship-yard this evening more encouraged than he has been for a long time. While the war news is no better, it seems that the city authorities are at last becoming aroused to the great danger confronting New York, the richest city in the country, which is entirely surrounded by water, and is thus exposed on all sides to enemy attacks, with a view to its capture as a splendid prize. It seems incredible to say so, but the truth is that little has been done to fortify the city, for so many people have opposed the war and desired to make peace on any terms, and give up the freedom of the seas for our ships if necessary, that those who have been loyal among the authorities have met with great obstacles. At last, it seems that our people are to forget politics in the face of a very great danger: Napoleon has abdicated, and Great Britain can release thousands of troops from service in Europe, and send them here.

This seems like a terrible calamity to me, but my father is calm and almost cheerful. He has informed us that he has no fear over the final outcome of the war if American ingenuity and skill can really be encouraged to do their part in winning the conflict, and has told us a remarkable piece of news which will soon become public. Mr. Robert Fulton, the inventor, not content with propelling a passenger-ship by

steam, has plans for a steam *warship*, to be covered with iron, which artillery will not be able to pierce. It sounds like the wildest of dreams, yet my father has great faith in it. This steam war frigate, as it is called, will be built at once in my father's shipyard.

When he had told us this, I said to him: "Then you have entire confidence in the skill and courage of our men?" My father replied: "Yes, my daughter, and I have equal faith in our women!" He patted me affectionately, and I felt much encouraged, though of course I realized that he said this only out of attachment to me, and not because he expects me to invent a steam war frigate!

May 19. I have not been able to find a moment to write for three days. Both my brothers have obtained leave to-morrow, and will bring several of their fellow-officers here with them, and mother and I have been very busy arranging the house and planning entertainments for these gentlemen. Father was slightly upset to hear this, as he is to bring up a guest to-morrow himself, who evidently will not care for entertainments. He is a young military engineer who has been working with Mr. Fulton, my father says, and who has some extraordinary ideas of his own on the subject of artillery. My father says most people laugh at Mr. Peter Ward, for this is his name, but he

thinks everyone's ideas should have at least a hearing in this time of national danger, since some new idea may save the country. So he has invited Mr. Ward to come here and dine and spend the night and discuss his inventions. Altogether, we shall be fully occupied to-morrow!

May 21. I had the first good time yesterday evening that I have had for months. Our boys came with their friends, and were very happy over being home again. They looked splendid in their uniforms with blue coats trimmed with silver lace, yellow trousers, high boots, and beaver caps with red plumes. Mr. Ward arrived with a great case of papers, and was introduced to the company, but seemed to have very little to say. He was of course in plain dress, and perhaps he felt outshone by the uniforms. However, he does not look like an inventor, so he need not have felt embarrassed. That sounds rather unkind! What I means is, that he might be rather handsome if he were not so solemn.

He and father disappeared into the library after dinner, just as our neighbors, whom we had invited over to dance, were driving up in their carriages. I did not see him again until late in the evening, when he passed the doorway of the ballroom just as my partner and I were taking our places for the final dance. I

thought he gazed at me with intense disapproval. I suppose he thinks me frivolous to dance in wartime.

May 25. Mr. Ward has been with us ever since I wrote the last entry. He goes to the shipyards with my father every day, and they spend the whole of every evening and most of the night in the library. He is very serious and silent.

June 3. Our merry times are at an end. To-day, just as we were assembling for dinner, intelligence arrived that fifteen thousand British troops, released from service abroad, had sailed for this country. Our party was immediately broken up, and we bade a sad farewell to our soldiers, who were to report at their camps at once.

Our only guest at the quiet meal which followed was Mr. Ward, who leaves to-morrow, having at last, no doubt, told my father everything there is to know about guns. Although he has been here two weeks, I scarcely feel at all acquainted with him, for he has been so quiet. I must say that he acted in a very gentleman like manner on seeing the sorrow of my parents on parting with their sons, and said not a word about guns during the whole meal. I was astonished to find that he can talk well on many subjects, and is as fond of plays and music as I am myself.

June 4. As I was working in my garden before breakfast this morning, I heard a step behind me, and turning around saw Mr. Ward.

"I must compliment you on your taste in flowers," he said, after we had exchanged "Good-mornings."

"I had no idea you paid compliments," I said with a smile.

"Are you like everybody else," he retorted, "and think that I have no interests other than cannon and shot?"

"By no means. And as to that, those are the most proper interests for a young man to-day, in my opinion."

Mr. Ward looked pleased, and said:

"I see you are a worthy sister for two soldier brothers. But I would expect that from a young lady who plants such wonderful nasturtiums."

I did not understand his meaning, and stood looking at him, trowel in hand.

"In the language of flowers," he explained, "the nasturtium means 'patriotism.'"

"I didn't know that! But I am doubly glad, then, that I thought of planting these to cover the break in the coping around the flower-beds. I chose them because the flowers and leaves grow so fast and thick, without knowledge of what the blossom signifies."

"Why, every flower has some meaning," he began, and I suppose would have recited them

all from Acacia to Zinnia if a servant had not come along the path at that moment and called us to breakfast. After breakfast he made his adieux, and departed with my father.

June 11. The last week has been without events worthy of record. The weather is beautiful, and my garden grows apace.

June 12. Here, at last, is something to write about! A messenger arrived to-day with a package addressed to me, and on opening it I found it came from Mr. Ward, who, it seems, can make presents as well as he can invent guns and pay compliments. It contained a book and the following note:

“If Miss Esther Jaffrey will honor the giver by accepting this humble offering as a token of gratitude for the many favors which he has received from her esteemed father, she will be rewarded by finding in its pages many interesting and curious facts regarding the flowers which she cultivates with such success in the garden of the home where she is the chief ornament.

Very respectfully,

PETER WARD.

The name of the book is “The ‘Lady’s Bouquet, or, The Language of Flowers.’” I was quite overpowered by the attention from a man who my father says is one of the leading engineers here in spite of his youth, and at once wrote him a note of thanks which I copied

three times. Even then all my sentences were much shorter than his, but I had to stop some time.

I took the book into the garden and started to look up various flowers in it. The significations are all very curious. I found that the lily-of-the-valley means "return of happiness," and was much cheered at the thought of the war ending. The next flower I looked up was the morning-glory, which meant "extinguished hope," and I was again plunged in despair! However, it was very kind of Mr. Ward to think of me.

June 21. A few days ago I spent most of the morning on our lawn, watching Commodore Decatur's ship taking soundings in Hell Gate. It was marvelous to see the dexterity with which his pilot steered the ship between the rocks, in the dangerous, boiling waves.

To-day my father tells us that as a result of these soundings, it has been shown that a ship of any size can pass through Hell Gate with a skilled pilot! We thought ourselves safe from invasion in that direction, at least. Now plans are being rushed for strong blockhouses at this part of the river.

The keel of Mr. Fulton's steam war frigate has been laid. My father says that Mr. Ward is working day and night on his artillery. At first I thought he ought to be in the army or

navy, but now I see that he can serve the country perhaps better with his inventions. We must not judge people harshly because they do not always act just the way we think they ought to when we first see them. We might be wrong.

July 7. The fifteen thousand British troops have reached Bermuda! It is thought they may be intended for the invasion of New York. My father says the city is in a perfect turmoil. It is an armed camp, with soldiers drilling everywhere.

July 15. When I went to the garden this morning, the island in the river just above us was covered with men. They were breaking ground for a blockhouse to command Hell Gate. This brings the war to our very door! If I could but help—but I am absolutely useless.

The steam war frigate in the shipyard has been ordered heavily guarded by troops, my father says. Spies are feared. So not only the soldiers and sailors are in danger, but workers like Mr. Ward, and of course my father, are in constant peril.

August 11. The Mayor has called on every able-bodied citizen to turn out and help complete the earthworks that are to defend New York against a land invasion. British troops have arrived at the mouth of Long Island Sound, and some have landed.

August 16. The blockhouse on the island is rising. It seems that Mr. Ward is to be sent there to direct the mounting of the guns, and will again be our guest while he is working there. He arrives to-morrow.

August 20. For two weeks I have almost enjoyed myself—that is, I have experienced a strange kind of pleasure that I never knew before. I have been busy aiding my mother every day in preparing refreshments to be sent to the men working on the blockhouse on the island, and several evenings I have taken her place in remaining up until my father could reach home and have some supper. He is now detained every day at the yards until a late hour.

Our people are at last united. We hear no more suggestions that we shall make peace on any terms but our own. Each one of us is occupied in doing his duty, whatever that may be, for our beloved country, and in this occupation we all find happiness.

August 26. Last evening my father arrived home very late. I was sitting up for him, and he was so tired and distraught that I saw something unusual had occurred, and devoted all my efforts to making him eat and drink. He finally did so, without saying a word. In a few minutes Mr. Ward rushed in entirely without cere-

mony, looking if anything more concerned than my father.

“Have you got them?” cried my father, in the greatest alarm.

“I have, sir. We were just in time,” replied Mr. Ward, and sank down in a chair as if in the depths of exhaustion.

Naturally, I said nothing, but I at once poured him some coffee, set it down near his elbow, and took my seat again. For several minutes neither he nor my father moved nor spoke. At length he noticed the coffee, evidently attracted by the aroma, as I had hoped, drank it quickly down, and for the first time glanced at me, apparently in gratitude.

I know nothing whatever about the matter to which he and my father referred, of course. What problems and burdens they have! I am happy to be of the smallest use to either of them.

August 27. The most crushing blow has fallen on us all! This morning we heard that Washington has been captured and burned! The President's Mansion, the Library of Congress, nearly every public building, has been destroyed! The flames were seen in Baltimore.

Only one bright spot stands out in this dreadful calamity. Mrs. Madison, the President's wife, managed to carry the Declaration of In-

dependence and a portrait of President Washington to a place of safety.

The news arrived at breakfast. Such a distressing scene I never before witnessed. My poor mother, thinking of her sons, was dissolved in tears. My father was nearly prostrated. Mr. Ward remained very quiet, but he paced the floor in agitation and left his breakfast cooling on the table. Their suffering caused me the greatest anguish, and all I could do was to refrain from adding to it. I actually managed to keep back my tears for a long time, and then I said:

"I have finished, mother. Shall I go and begin preparing the food for the workers?"

"Join me in an hour, Esther," replied my mother. "I wish to talk to your father."

I rushed out into my garden, and once there sat down on one of the stone benches and wept bitterly.

Presently a step behind me caused me to withdraw my handkerchief from my eyes. Mr. Ward was standing beside me.

"You will pardon my addressing you at this moment," he said very gently, "but I saw you come out here, and I followed you because I am in urgent need of help which I believe you alone can give me."

I gazed at him in astonishment.

"I must speak very plainly," he continued.

“You realize, do you not, that we are in the greatest danger? That the enemy will now move on New York, and may arrive within a week? And that his advance-guard is already with us?”

His meaning flashed on me.

“You mean spies?” I whispered.

He nodded.

“Day before yesterday they had that case of mine in their possession for an hour. It was under guard on the island, and the guard was overpowered, but managed to give the alarm, and we got it back with the seals unbroken.”

I now realized the cause of the agitation of Mr. Ward and my father two evenings before.

“That case,” continued Mr. Ward in a low tone, “contains my formulas for making a new sort of shot which our Government has just tested and approved, and also all the records of my researches in inventing this shot. It is not a solid cannon-shot, like the ones now in use, but a hollow shell which contains powder and explosives. It is my intention to give this to the United States, for no one else in the world has anything like it. It is considered very powerful and valuable. Naturally, it would be of great advantage for the enemy to obtain possession of these papers and drawings. As we know how to manufacture these shells, we do not need the contents of the case

just at present, but it is highly important that they shall be kept safely. I am going to ask you to keep them here."

"Here? Why? And why do you ask me?" The questions all sprang to my lips at once.

"Yes, in this house. Because it is so out of the way that even in an invasion it would likely be spared, and it is so evidently a gentleman's country residence that no one would ever suspect it held such a secret. And I ask you because I believe you are more to be trusted than anyone else I know."

I must have looked my amazement, for he continued:

"It is true. In the midst of these terrible days, you have remained perfectly calm, your only thought, apparently, for your parents, your brothers, and those around you. From that first evening I saw you dancing with those soldiers, cheering them on what may be their last leave, I noted your unselfish patriotism. You ask no questions—you do the work that comes to your hand—I know that you can keep a secret. Can you hide that case of mine somewhere safely here?"

For one instant—it seemed an eternity!—I thought more intensely than ever before in my life. Then I replied:

"I can. I remember that my father told me that when he built this house a secret room was

built under the second chimney. As in older houses, it was built simply as a hiding-place in case of some emergency, and when there seemed to be no probable use for it, he had the entrance covered, because the door closed with a spring, and he was afraid that my brothers might get trapped there some day while they were playing about it. I have never seen the room, but I know where the entrance used to be. It is in the wainscoting of my private sitting-room in the guest wing. Come, and I will show you."

We flew to the back of the house, up the narrow staircase, and down the little passage to this end room, where I am now writing. I pointed to a small place about three feet wide, where the chimney-piece jutted into the room.

"It was here, father says. He simply had the wainscoting matched in thin wood, and covered with a second layer so that it appears like the rest of the room."

"Wait here one moment," ordered Mr. Ward.

He was back instantly, with his case in one hand and a small tool in the other. Faster than I can write it, he drew the nails from the wainscoting. The three feet of false woodwork fell off, revealing a duplicate wainscoting below.

He dropped the tool, and started to try for the spring, pressing every part of the paneling in turn. Not until he had reached the third

and last panel was it found. Then we heard a creak, the panel loosened under his hands and slid to the left, revealing a tiny winding staircase.

At this very instant we heard a voice outside the window on the lawn. It was one of the servants, asking my mother if Mr. Ward had gone, as there was a message for him from the commander of the island. We exchanged quick glances. I snatched the case from his hand, and he rushed out of the room and downstairs.

I sprang through the open panel and up the stairs, nearly strangled with dust. The secret room was quite empty, and lighted only by a tiny slip in the roof. I could not bear to leave the case in all that dust, so I took off my India muslin scarf and wrapped it in that before laying it on the floor. Then I came downstairs. The false paneling was lying on the floor. I snatched it up, ran up the steps again, and hid it also. I then descended, snapped the door shut, dusted myself off, and went back to the garden.

How peaceful it was there! Yet how violently my heart beat! And still the excitement was not past.

"Miss Jaffrey!" said Mr. Ward's voice behind me. He came across the garden at a run.

"All is well," I assured him.

"There is one thing more. I leave you immediately!"

"You leave us!" I cried, and I fear must have shown the dismay I felt, for he drew me gently to a bench and made me sit down.

"I am ordered across the river to inspect the great blockhouse there. My consolation in leaving you is that I know that if that fort and the one on the island are perfected, this point where you are will be thoroughly guarded against attacks. I shall then receive further orders. I do not know where they will take me. Our secret rests with the two of us, and the fewer who know it, the safer it will be. But we must provide for its communication in case of need. It is war time—every man's life is in danger, and I am sure you are brave enough to be facing the fact that you may have to flee from your home."

"I realize that, Mr. Ward," I said. "How shall we arrange for the communication of the secret?"

"I have time only to write the directions for finding the case, and leave them with you to conceal somewhere in your sitting-room—perhaps under a brick of the hearth. I can tell one of the other engineers that they will be in that room, in case of need. That is a poor plan, but I am to leave at once, and there is no time to improve it."

He drew writing materials from his pocket. It seemed to me as if I could not endure to risk such a secret in this way, just for lack of a little time to make it safe. The flower-beds swam before my eyes, and then—I saw what could be done.

“I have thought of something better,” I said. “Let me make a code that contains the secret, and will involve no risk of discovery by the wrong person.”

“How will you do it?”

“I will embroider a sampler with flowers whose signification will reveal the secret. I will hang it with my other samplers in the living-room. You can tell that one other person where to look for the directions. No one else can ever suspect anything.”

“Invaluable girl!” cried Mr. Ward, with a warmth quite unknown in him before. “I thought I knew your worth, but I did not!”

The wheels of his carriage rolled up the driveway. He rose to go. We were both silent. He moved to the garden wall and plucked something, and then returned to me.

“If you read the book I gave you, Esther,” he said, “you will understand this parting token.”

The flower was a sweet-pea. I remembered its meaning—“Departure—think of me.”

I could not speak, but I stretched my hand out

to the wall, picked an ivy leaf, and held it out to him. I knew from his face that he understood its significance—"Fidelity." He kissed my hand, and left me.

August 28. I have spent the whole day working on my sampler. My mother was glad to see me so calm, and commended as ingenious my device of putting the alphabet, usually set forth by itself, into a rhyme, saying that it made an unusual bit of work that she would be glad to have exhibited on the drawing-room wall.

The choice of flowers for the code was less easy than I had fancied. After much searching and thought, however, I settled on the following, with their respective meanings, and embroidered the house, and the tree protecting the second chimney:

Iris.....I have a message for you.

Buttercups....Riches (the best I could do. After all, are not these plans worth more than wealth?)

Juniper.....A hiding-place.

Nasturtiums...Patriotism.

This means: "A message; riches hidden near second chimney, for the cause of patriotism."

At least, the meaning will be clear to anyone who is directed to find the sampler, and if the plans are never required, they will be safe. I am tired, but happy.

August 30. The sampler is finished, framed, and hung. Its design and color are much admired by my friends.

September 2. The city is covered with fortifications. The citizens all are united to defend it, to the very end. Peter Ward has been ordered away, no one knows where.

September 14. The great victory of Lieutenant McDonough on Lake Champlain has turned the tide at last! Those of us who strove to serve their country at all times see our reward at hand.

We are to leave next week for our house in town.

February 12, 1815. I have not written for months in this volume, but how often have I read it! And now—*the war is over!* A ship arrived yesterday bringing the treaty of peace.

Yet, as always, with the sweet comes the bitter. Peter Ward, released from war service, expects to sail at once for Europe, and will study engineering in Paris, as did Mr. Robert Fulton, several years ago. He will remain a long time.

September 30, 1815. This is my last entry in this diary.

We have spent the summer here again, but it may be the last summer I shall pass here for some time.

My father is going abroad next month on

business, and my mother and I are to accompany him. We shall spend the winter in Paris, where my elder brother is now attaché at our Legation. He writes that many gayeties are in store for us, and that he meets Peter Ward often at the houses of mutual friends.

I cannot take this diary with me, so I shall leave it in the secret room beside Peter's case. If I return—if this house continues to be my home—I shall find great consolation in reading over the story of those happy, even though dreadful, wartime days. And if—if my home shall be elsewhere, and my hopes fulfilled, I shall not need you, shall I, dear Diary? So rest quietly, beside the treasures that my sampler guards, until the right time shall come for you to tell your story!

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CHAPTER XV

CLEAR SKIES

EVELYN closed the diary.

For several minutes no one spoke. All the girls sat thinking of that other girl of long ago, who, in the very room where they were sitting, which to-day belonged to one of their own number, had done so much for the country and the friend she loved. Finally the silence was broken by Virginia, who gave a long sigh.

"Oh-h-h! Did she marry him?"

Everybody laughed, and Helena said kindly:

"Very likely she did, Jinny. She left the book here, and that looks as if she did, don't you think so?"

"Oh, I *hope* so," replied Virginia earnestly, "but I want to know."

"Rose, perhaps your father might know," said Priscilla.

"If I get a chance, I'll ask him," said Rose, "but he's very busy just now."

"Maybe that book he wrote about American families would tell," suggested Evelyn.

"Yes, it might. I have a copy of it here," said Rose, turning to her bookcase. "Oh, bother! There's the doorbell."

"I'll go for you," said Evelyn, who was near the door. "You find the book."

She left the room, but returned almost immediately.

"Your mother was down in the hall right by the door, Rose. What does the book say?"

" 'Jaffrey,' read Rose from the index of the small gray volume, " 'page128.' Here's the family: 'Stephen Jaffrey of New York, ship-builder, merchant. Married . . . two sons . . .' Oh, girls, here it is! 'One daughter, Esther, born 1798, married 1816, in Paris, France, to Peter Ward!' "

"Then that's all right!" said Virginia with relief. "I'm so glad!"

"I guess we all are. I was crazy to know, myself," admitted Helena.

"And so this is Esther's India muslin scarf," said Aline, fingering the old embroidery that was lying on the table beside her, "and Rose's father has Peter's case of papers! Then we know about everything that was found upstairs except those pieces of wood Evelyn mentioned."

"They must be the false woodwork," said Dorothy.

"That's exactly what they are," agreed

Rose, "for they had little holes in them like the hole I stuck the buttonhook into when I was trying to move the secret door. Those must be the old nail-holes."

"Well, Esther's diary is very interesting," said Muriel, as the girls rose to leave, for the afternoon was nearly gone, but I don't think it's nearly so exciting as the play Evelyn made up about her!"

"We should think not!" agreed all the Linger-Nots loyally. "You could never make a play about a sampler."

Just at this moment Mrs. Willing came down the hall looking for Rose, and was so evidently anxious to speak to her at once that Priscilla said:

"Don't bother to come down to the door, Rose. We know the way! We've all had a perfectly wonderful time."

"You must all come again soon and see the secret room after we've had the vacuum cleaner up there," said Rose hospitably.

She followed her mother up the hall to the sitting-room, and the girls ran downstairs and dispersed to their homes. Joyce and Evelyn arrived home just as dinner was ready, and their narration of the adventures of that remarkable day made that dinner one of the most interesting ever served in the Barry household.

And still the day was not over! They had

hardly left the table when there was a ring at the doorbell, and the next moment Rose came rushing in, more excited than Evelyn had seen her even at any time that afternoon.

"Please excuse me for interrupting you!" she gasped apologetically. "Such a wonderful thing has happened! I must tell Evelyn right away, and father thought I had better not telephone about it just yet."

"Sit down, Rose, and tell us all," said Mrs. Barry. "What can have brought you over so late, in the dark?"

"I know it's late, and dark too, but mother said I might come if I ran both ways. Evelyn, do you remember that time the bell rang this afternoon, when I had started to look for the book?"

"Yes."

"That was a telegram for father, from the State Librarian. And it said: 'Lost documents found. Letter follows. See morning papers!'"

"Rose! How perfectly splendid! I am so glad!" cried Evelyn. "Do you know where they were found?"

"No, not yet. Now, how is anybody in our house going to sleep a wink to-night?"

"You'll all sleep the sleep of the just," said Mr. Barry, "for this evidently means, Rose, that your father has not a single cloud on his

reputation. I don't envy the State Library the explanations they will have to make."

"Oh, that telegram was the best thing that happened this whole wonderful day!" said Rose. "I wanted to tell Evelyn about it right away because she has a sort of connection with it."

"Why, how?" asked Evelyn.

"Father says that those documents you found in the case in the secret room are of the greatest importance and interest, and he thinks that the Society will likely want him to edit them for publication."

"Then if he can do that, perhaps your college plans will go through after all!" exclaimed Evelyn.

"Oh, of course it's only a possibility yet, but if it turns out the way we hope it will be all due to you, Evelyn," said Rose, hugging her, as she started to leave.

Evelyn and Joyce reached the breakfast table the instant the meal was ready next morning, but their father was ahead of them, and was searching the columns of his newspaper for an article about the State Library.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed, as they took their seats, "and I'll read it to you. It's headed:

**"LOST" DOCUMENTS WERE MISPLACED
TEN YEARS**

The remarkable return to light of important documents, the property of the State, after an absence of nearly ten years, was reported yesterday by State Librarian George Parker.

These documents comprised a unique collection of papers and pamphlets on early American inventions in the field of naval artillery. They bore the general title: "Ships and Guns, United States, 1800-1815." They disappeared at the time of the famous fire in the State Library, and have never been seen since.

Yesterday a writer collecting material for a paper on silverware was referred by the library catalogue to look for information about porringers and tankards in a file marked "*Vessels*." In this file he discovered the lost group of documents. They were not arranged in order. No. 8 was uppermost, and bore the title: "Vessels Using Chain-Shot: the *Victrix* and the *Baltimore*."

It was evident that through carelessness these documents had been classified in the file under "*Vessels*" instead of under "*Ships*," where they belonged.

Mr. Parker at once hastened to communicate the discovery to Mr. Howard Willing, the well-known authority on American antiques. Mr. Willing was the last person who used the "lost" documents, having, by a strange coincidence, been examining them at the very hour of the

fire. Their disappearance has always greatly distressed Mr. Willing, though he was in no way to blame for it, and their return to light confirms what he has always contended, that he returned them at once to the library desk when the alarm was given.

Even their disarrangement confirms this statement, for it would appear that Mr. Willing was working on No. 8, and handed back the papers instantly without waiting to put them in order. The librarian who took them, through excitement, inattention, or carelessness, evidently thrust them into the wrong file, whence a fortunate accident has recovered them after the passage of ten years.

"Mother," said Evelyn, as her father laid down the paper, "I don't want any more breakfast. I want to go over and see Rose before school."

"Go, dear," said her mother, laughing, "and I'll make some extra sandwiches for your luncheon-box."

How green the little park looked in the May sunshine, how red the chimneys of the Jaffrey House, how blue the wisteria vine was budding, as Evelyn sped down the steps of her home and along the parkway! Never had the silver river shone so brightly, or the bold black smokestacks on the other shore looked so full of strength

and power. And there was Rose, waving wildly out of her bedroom window, as Evelyn turned into the northern entrance to Willett Park.

"Wait for me on the lawn!" called Rose. "I'll be right down."

Evelyn strolled down the walk to the front of the old mansion, and gazed at the little green islands, the white-caps of stormy Hell Gate, and a great ship that was passing up toward the Sound and the ocean beyond, with a rapture that even she had never felt before.

"I couldn't ask you to come upstairs just now," explained Rose, coming down the front porch steps. "Father is so excited that he doesn't know what he's doing, except that he's getting up a speech of gratitude to recite to you when he's calm enough. Evelyn, I do believe this is the first time I ever was really happy, and it's your doing!"

"Oh, my dear Rose," said Evelyn uncomfortably, "I thought we finished talking about those documents in the case last night."

"But that's not the latest," cried Rose, "you don't know what's happened this morning!"

"Yes, father read us the article in the paper about how they found those State Library documents, and I'm just as glad as if my own father and not yours had been concerned."

"But that's not what I'm talking about, child!"

“Well, what now?”

“Mr. Marsden called father on the telephone in the middle of breakfast, said he had seen the article, and I guess managed somehow to explain about his refusing the book on fighting ships. Anyway, father is to go down to-day to Mr. Marsden’s office to sign the contract for the book.”

“Then, Rose, you are going to college, if your father has two books in prospect.”

“Yes, and I’m going to camp all summer! Evelyn, you did it. You’re the best friend I or any of the Linger-Nots have ever had.”

“Friends!” said Evelyn thoughtfully. “Did I do anything for friendship? I suppose it looks best to say I did it just because it was for you, but it was more than that. Whatever I have done, I have done because it was the thing to do. On that account, you don’t owe me any gratitude but what belongs to one who tries to do whatever should be done. When we work together that way, I can see that it makes friendship and binds us in one social bond. If all the world could be trusted to be always trying to make things better, wouldn’t it be a happy world!”

“So it would,” replied Rose, “but that is why we have our Linger-Nots. We make a little world of our own, and soon all learn, from the efforts of one, how much happier it is for

every one to seek the truth and keep faith with one another. Now we can enjoy the fields and the woods with no sorrow in our hearts."

They clasped hands and looked over to the little green islands and then across at the great ship fast fading from view on its far-away journey. Whatever was happening elsewhere in the world, they felt a mutual trust of friendship that wrongdoers can never know. Evelyn broke the silence.

"What fun we'll have at camp!" cried Evelyn," and then we'll come back here beside the river, to the best place in the world! Think of all the things that can happen!"

"Can they? I wonder if there's really anything left to happen," said Rose.

"Of course there is," cried Evelyn, gazing up the silver stream to the great bridge on the horizon. "This is a place where wonderful things have always happened, and they'll go right on!"

"Our experience has made a kind of creed or code for me," said Rose, with tears coming into her eyes. "Wherever there is true friendship, good things will happen to one another. The Linger-Nots have learned how happy we all are when we are working together for some useful purpose."

"You are right," added Evelyn. "Life is a novel in daily installments, each chapter in-

creasing the interest. I can hardly wait for next summer to see what will happen to us then. But leave it to the Linger-Nots."

And so what happened to them is told in the next book entitled "The Linger-Nots and the Valley Feud, or, The Great West Point Chain."

THE END

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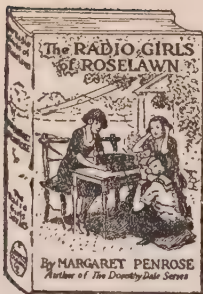
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